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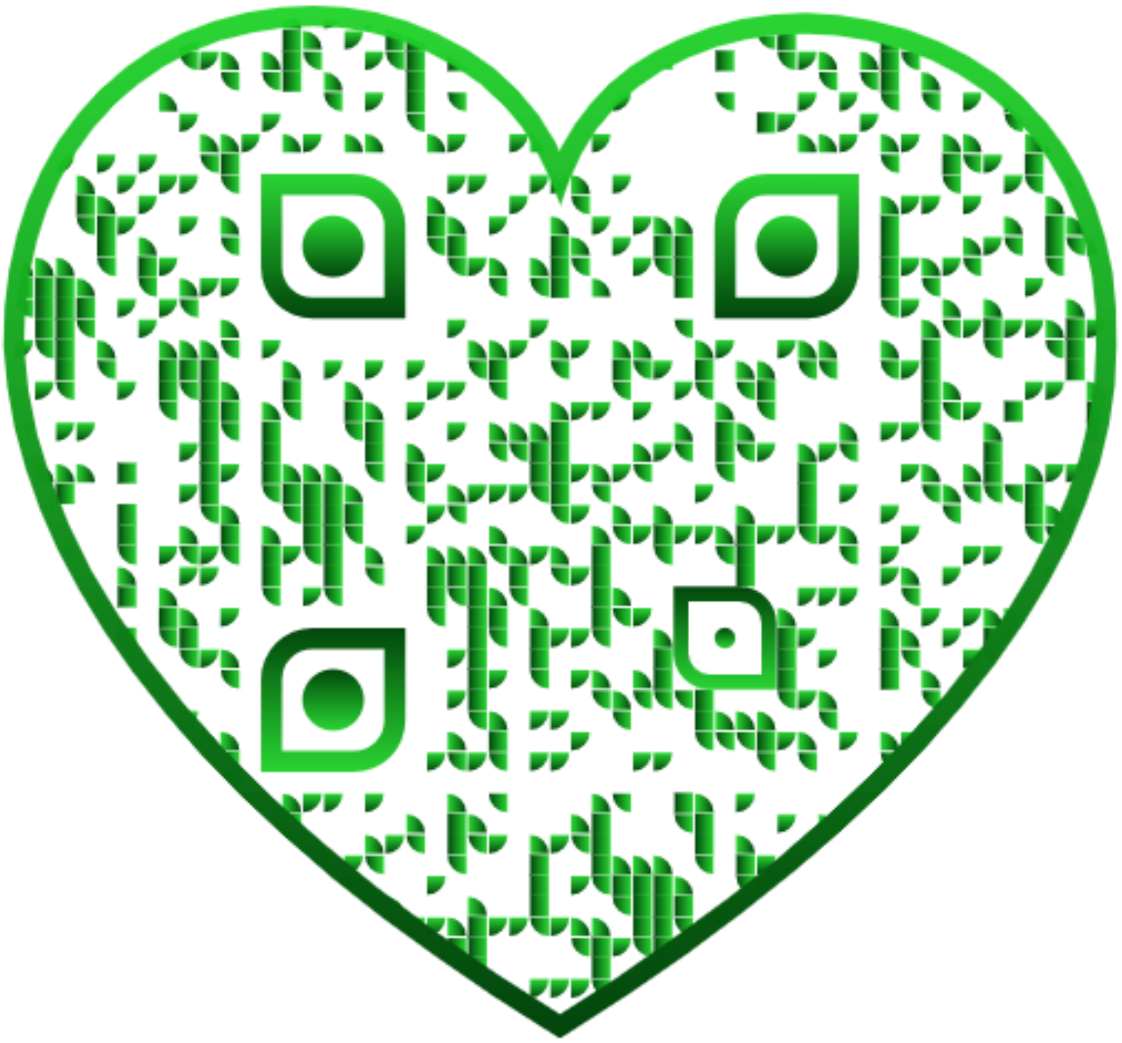

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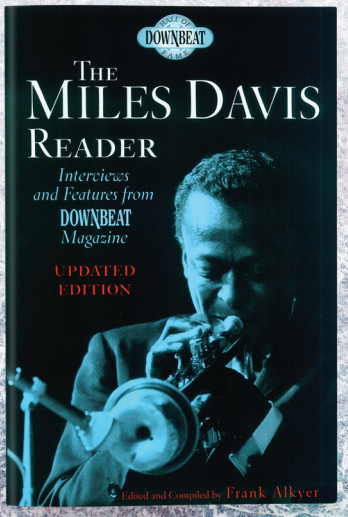

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Assistant to the Publisher	Sue Mahal
Bookkeeper	Evelyn Hawkins

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Jennifer Ruban-Gentile
Associate Publisher
630-359-9345
jenr@downbeat.com

Musical Instruments & East Coast Schools
Ritche Deraney
Vice President of Sales
201-445-6260
ritched@downbeat.com

Record Companies & Schools
Dan Kulasik
Advertising Sales Associate
630-359-9338
dank@downbeat.com

OFFICES

188 W. Industrial Dr., Ste. 310, Elmhurst, IL 60126
630-941-2030
http://downbeat.com
editor@downbeat.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE

877-904-5299 / service@downbeat.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Senior Contributors:
Aaron Cohen, Howard Mandel, John McDonough

Atlanta: Jon Ross; **Boston:** Frank-John Hadley, Allen Morrison; **Chicago:** Alain Drouot, Michael Jackson, Jeff Johnson, Peter Margasak, Bill Meyer, Paul Natkin, Howard Reich; **Indiana:** Mark Sheldon; **Los Angeles:** Earl Gibson, Sean J. O'Connell, Chris Walker, Josef Woodard, Scott Yanow; **Michigan:** John Ephland; **Minneapolis:** Andrea Canter; **Nashville:** Bob Doerschuk; **New Orleans:** Erika Goldring, Jennifer Odell; **New York:** Herb Boyd, Bill Douthart, Philip Freeman, Stephanie Jones, Matthew Kassel, Jimmy Katz, Suzanne Lorge, Phillip Lutz, Jim Macnie, Ken Micallef, Bill Milkowski, Allen Morrison, Dan Ouellette, Ted Panken, Tom Staudter, Jack Vartoogian; **Philadelphia:** Shaun Brady; **Portland:** Robert Ham; **San Francisco:** Yoshi Kato, Denise Sullivan; **Seattle:** Paul de Barros; **Washington, D.C.:** Willard Jenkins, John Murph, Michael Wilderman; **Canada:** J.D. Considine, James Hale; **France:** Jean Szlamowicz; **Germany:** Hyou Vielz; **Great Britain:** Andrew Jones; **Portugal:** José Duarte; **Romania:** Virgil Mihaiu; **Russia:** Cyril Moshkow. **Contributor Emeritus:** Fred Bouchard.

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NOVEMBER 2023

inside

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Chasing Comets
BY DAN OUELLETTE

Brazil-born, Los Angeles-based singer Luciana Souza discusses her first-time collaboration with the renowned Trio Corrente. It's a monumental shift sweetened with Brazilian classics and originals in the samba spirit. *Cometa* translates from Portuguese into the English word *comet* — a rare fascination of celestial fire, ice and awe.

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"I didn't want to suggest songs because I really love my music," Lins said of letting others curate the songs he would perform on his new album, ***My Heart Speaks***.

Cover photo by Arnaldo Pappalardo

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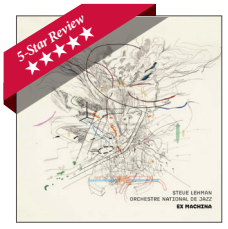

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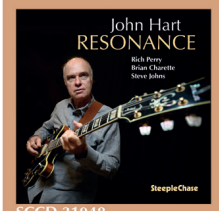

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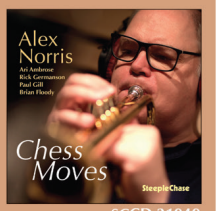

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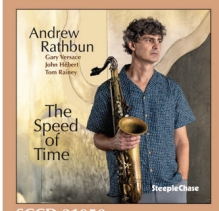

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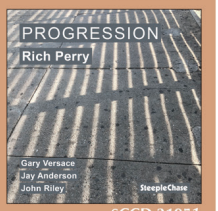

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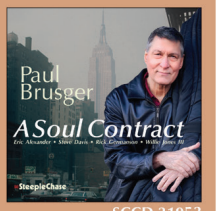

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Honoring Traditions

SEPTEMBER 22, 2023 — FOR A WHILE during the dark times of the pandemic, this column often started with a "dateline," the day the piece was being written, just to mark the time and place during a very uncertain period. In this space cadet's mind, it was a small tribute to *Star Trek*, when Captain James T. Kirk would begin each episode by saying something like, "Captain's log, star date 1277.1" (which is actually the fictional captain's birthdate), as a way of preparing an audience for an adventure into parts unknown.

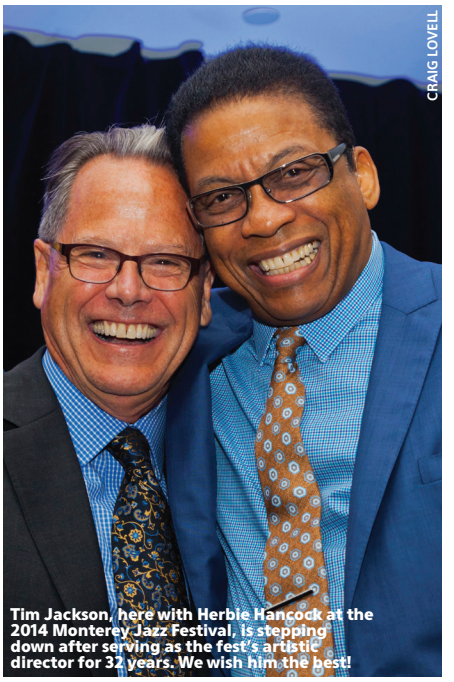
It sure felt that way then, and we're still listening intently to projects that were made during, or were inspired by, those "interesting times."

On this star date, the band at DownBeat has lovingly uploaded the November issue to the printer, which means we'll soon be sending it off to you. It's all signed, sealed and delivered — well, except for this column: one last piece of unfinished business.

One of the repeated topics of those pandemic-written columns swirled around dreaming of seeing live music again — because there was nothing happening. The Monterey Jazz Festival was mentioned several times in those lockdown-era pieces because it's one of the granddaddies of live jazz celebration.

On this day, we're in Monterey, preparing to be wowed. Not gonna lie: Monterey (now in its 66th edition) is one of my happy places — a place of history and tradition, a place to see where this music's been and where it's heading.

We honor many in this issue who have played a role in or grew up at this festival. First and foremost, there's Tim Jackson, who after 32 years is stepping down from his role as artistic director. He is one of the true class acts in this business: kind, with a great ear and truly business savvy. It's a rare combination. We wish him well in retirement and pay tribute to his contributions to jazz with a DownBeat Honor, this magazine's Lifetime Achievement Award. That article begins on page 66. And while you're there, we encourage you to check out all of this year's DownBeat Honors recipients. They represent people who have worked tirelessly as business executives or educators in jazz bringing their love and passion for this art form to millions — yes, millions — of people. Curt Gaesser, director of the Folsom High School Jazz Band, has brought many of his groups to Monterey to perform. He is being enshrined in the DownBeat Hall of Fame for Jazz Education. Read about him on page 68. Susan Muscarella, founder of


CRAIG LOVELL
Tim Jackson, here with Herbie Hancock at the 2014 Monterey Jazz Festival, is stepping down after serving as the fest's artistic director for 32 years. We wish him the best!

Jazzschool and the California Jazz Conservatory in Berkeley, California, also has a strong connection to the fest. She, too, is being enshrined in the DB Hall for Jazz Education.

On Saturday, here at the Monterey Festival, the John Santos Sextet is scheduled to play. Based in the San Fransico Bay Area, he's another local, national and international favorite. For anyone who hasn't heard this legendary percussionist and his groups, his music has always had one foot in the present, the other in the future, and his heart is deeply rooted in the traditions of Latin jazz. We feature Santos on page 34 as part of our Latin Jazz focus this month in celebration of his beautiful and, yes, tradition-rich new project, *Filosofía Caribeña Vol. 3: A Puerto Rico Del Alma*.

And, finally, we honor the passing of three amazing members of the jazz family: saxophonist/multi-instrumentalist Charles Gayle; bassist and educator Richard Davis; and trombonist Curtis Fowlkes. The tradition of publishing a Final Bar in a print magazine may seem quaint in this day and age, where such information is passed across social media and digital platforms at lightning speed, but we still think it's essential, part of the jazz time capsule that each issue of DownBeat represents. That remains an core principle of our tradition: to write, edit and publish for today with an eye toward shedding some light on these amazing people in jazz for generations to come. **DB**

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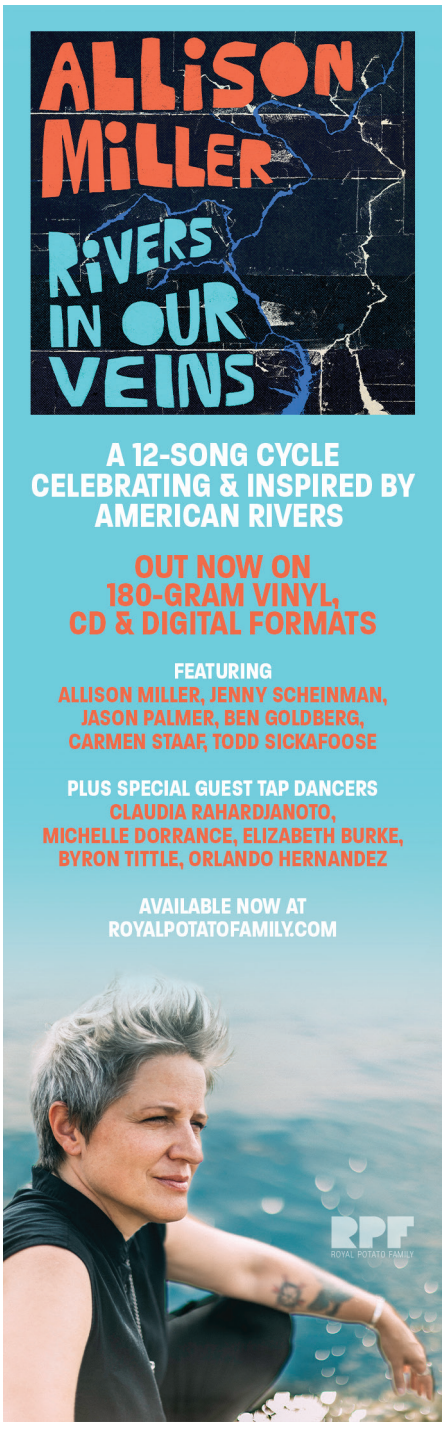

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Chords & Discords

October Surprises

Before reading Gary Fukushima's article on Joshua Redman in the October issue I wasn't planning on purchasing his new record. I have followed Joshua since his first record, and I have seen him live numerous times. And my best friends became a fan of his and joined me for several shows.

Also, after reading The Hot Box reviews of the new James Brandon Lewis Red Lily Quintet record *For Mahalia, With Love*, I have added it to my buy list.

Thank you, Phillip Lutz, for the excellent tribute to the legendary Tony Bennett and the excellent article on pianist Aaron Parks. I wish I would have caught one of Tony's annual shows at The Ravinia Festival in Highland Park. It sounds like he always gave an excellent performance.

Also, thank you, Howard Mandel, for the short but sweet article on guitarist George Freeman. I saw him perform with his nephew's (Chico Freeman) group the first night of the Chicago Jazz Festival on Aug. 31. Thank you again for another issue packed with articles of interest to me and, hopefully, others.

MARC NEBOZENKO
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Houston, We Have a Correction

In your August issue, writer Paul de Barros did a wonderful feature on Houston Person. But one historical correction, if I may. Before the Four Tops did "It's All In The Game," many of us older readers will recall the stunning hit version recorded by Tommy Edwards in 1958. For me, at least, Tommy's reading of the tune will forever be the quintessential one.

BILL BENJAMIN
BILTMORE LAKE, NORTH CAROLINA

Blindfold Ted

I've been a dedicated reader of DownBeat since the '70s, and one of my favorite things is to go right to the back page Blindfold Test, kind of like dessert before the meal.

Alas, too often for the last few years, Ted Panken does the honors. I really don't get it. His regular interviewing features are top-notch, with a real sense of historical context. His Blindfold Test artist choices, however, are anything but — rarely (if ever!) does he play anything for the guest that was recorded before the 2000s, most in the last year or two.

For an art form so grandly in thrall to the past masters, this is beyond ridiculous. Mix it up a bit, man! Would it kill Panken to occasionally play a track or two by Bird, Duke, Mary Lou, the Brecker Brothers, Ornette or Toshiko?

I've never met a jazz musician who didn't LOVE to talk about those that went before them, those that influenced them, those that instilled this undying love for the music in all of us in the first place.

On those all too rare occasions when another critic subs for Panken, my soul does a little happy dance.

Please retire Ted from the Test and replace him with someone who appreciates that jazz didn't start with The Bad Plus.

B. MURRAY
EDMONTON, CANADA

Editor's Note: We love our Ted and won't be replacing him, but maybe he'll take your advice to heart. He knows the history of this music like few others.

This One Hurts

In my mind, I went through several (longer) iterations of this note before simply deciding to quote what a friend of mine said to me: "This one really hurts. Loved Tony. RIP."

JOE FRANK
KENNEBUNKPORT, MAINE

Editor's Note: Joe, I hope you enjoyed our tribute to Tony Bennett in the October issue.

Rising No More!

Can you please remove my name from "your" Rising Stars on clarinet? I'm 60 f@#?ing years old. It's embarrassing and should be for you as well at DB. Thank you in advance.

TIM MCLAUGHLIN
NEW ORLEANS
DOWNBEAT POLL HAS-BEEN

Lo the Tedium

John McDonough's album reviews are tedious in their close-minded predictability — I suspect I'm not alone in being able to anticipate what he's going to say simply based on whether the music hews to 70-year-old jazz parameters. But his error-filled, irreligious review of Mehmet Sanlikol's *Turkish Hipster* takes things to a new level of reckless disregard. I empathize with whatever personal difficulties may be behind the inability to bring thought and care to his writing, but it's past time for an end to his byline in DownBeat. You have too many hip, insightful writers.

MARTIN WISCKOL
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MICHAEL JACKSON

George Garzone and Claire Daly honor Frances Ballantyne, a 98-year-old jazz fan and former denizen of 52nd Street in its heyday.

Saxists Daly, Garzone Run the *Vuvu* Down

Following a string of tribute recordings — 2008's Rahsaan Roland Kirk project *Rah! Rah!*, 2011's *Mary Joyce Project: Nothing To Lose* and 2012's *Baritone Monk* — baritone saxophonist Claire Daly, a one-time Diva big band standout and member of Joel Forrester's quirky People Like Us quartet from the late '90s, has come up with yet another one in *Vuvu For Frances*, honoring Frances Ballantyne, the 98-year-old lifelong jazz fan and former denizen of 52nd Street in its heyday.

"I've known Frances maybe 25 years, and I would say she is my true mentor and role model of how to be in the world," said Daly. "She's a consummate New Yorker. You meet her and just instantly get that vibe from her. She was in an interracial marriage in the '40s and was on the forefront of the civil rights movement. She discovered live jazz in the 1940s in Harlem, so she was hanging out with people like Willie 'the Lion' Smith and Sidney Bechet. She knew the Baroness (British-born jazz patron Pannonica de Koenigswarter) and used to see Bird and Monk and that whole crowd on 52nd Street. In fact, when you look at cover of *Vuvu For Frances* — that famous Bill Gottlieb photo of 52nd Street in 1948, which his son let me use — you could easily imagine Frances being in one of those clubs on the

strip. It's literally right from that time."

A collection of hard-swinging standards featuring the New York rhythm section of pianist Jon Davis, drummer David F. Gibson and Daly's longtime collaborator, bassist Dave Hofstra, *Vuvu For Frances* finds the bari ace joining forces with Boston tenor sax legend George Garzone. The results on luxurious ballads like Johnny Mercer's "Fools Rush In," Ray Noble's "The Very Thought Of You" and bits of Ellingtonia like "Mood Indigo" and "Warm Valley" are simply sublime. But when they fire it up on uptempo swingers like Miles Davis' "Half Nelson," Charles Lloyd's "Sweet Georgia Bright" and a burning romp through Rodgers & Hammerstein's "People Will Say We're In Love," the results are scintillating.

Though their friendship goes back to the mid-'70s, when Daly was strictly an alto player studying with Garzone at Berklee College of Music, this was the first time the two played together on record. During her years in Boston, Daly bartended at Michael's jazz club on Gainsborough Street, just so she could see Garzone play every Monday night there with The Fringe.

She remained on that job for three years, taking in the spontaneous free-jazz from that legendary Boston trio of tenor titan Garzone, bassist Bob Appleman and drummer Bob Gullotti on a weekly basis. "At first, I didn't understand what was happening, but I wanted to know," she explained. "It was spontaneous and free, it was never the same. It was ultimately creative. And that shaped my musical life, for sure.

"I remember one time watching George solo," she continued. "He was kind of rocking and playing his head off, and I just thought, 'This is the closest thing to seeing John Coltrane I'm ever going to see,' not knowing then that he and Trane shared a birthday."

And while Garzone still regularly inhabits that intense "Trane zone," as he does so profoundly on Steve Kuhn's uptempo minor key waltz "The Saga Of Harrison Crabfeathers," using the opening of Coltrane's "Acknowledgement" from *A Love Supreme* as a launching pad into his heightened solo, he also has a long history of embracing standards in a more mellow vein. "When you hear him on 'Mood Indigo' on the new album, it's just so deep," said Daly. "That tune just slays me."

In fact, Garzone is partly responsible for naming the album. As Daly explained, "George and his wife were in town, and we were in my car, and at some point he asked me what I was doing. I told him I was going make a record for Frances, who he knew, and he said, 'When are you doing that?' When I told him we were going in to record in two weeks, he said, 'Oh, I could come down then.' So he offered to play on it. And when I told him that we were playing all standards and stuff that Frances likes, he said, 'Great, I'll do the *vuvu*.' Then he explained that *vuvu* is that saxophone sound that you hear where it's very airy and melodic and mellow-sounding. Initially, I was going to call the album *For Frances*. But after George told me that, I thought *Vuvu For Frances* was much better."

Garzone elaborated on the concept of *vuvu*: "I grew up in an Italian saxophone family and my uncle Rocco played tenor. He was from the old school, so when I started taking lessons with him in the back room of this pizza shop in Dorchester, Massachusetts, he was into that *vuvu*, which is the sound you hear from Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Stan Getz, Ben Webster. So Claire knows that playing free is my kind of thing, but she knows I can also handle the *vuvu*."

While Garzone thought he might contribute to just one or two pieces, he ended up playing on the entire album, with the exception of "Harlem Nocturne," which is more of a piano showcase for Davis. The two together swing copasetic and conversational, even engaging in some free-jazz overblowing at the tag on "The Lonely Goatherd," perhaps the corniest Rodgers & Hammerstein tune from *The Sound of Music*. "I tried to play it straight on the first take," said Garzone. "Oh, my god, forget about it! I was laughing so hard I couldn't do it. I said, 'Claire, I'm so sorry.' I couldn't play the thing normal."

Added Daly, "The Fringe is so much a part of George's history. … That idea of 'just get in there and go!' And I wanted to honor that, too, on this record. So I just thought, 'Well, Frances will forgive us if we just have one completely off-the-rails throwdown.' And she did."

The rest of the tunes, from Jimmy Van Heusen–Sammy Cahn's "All The Way" to Rodgers & Hart's "Manhattan," are all timeless standards that may have fallen out of fashion but are still beloved by jazz fans like Frances Ballantyne.

"For me, it's important to keep this music and that whole spirit of 52nd Street alive," said Garzone. "That's the story of this record. And I told Claire, 'This record has a good chance of hitting just because of what it represents. Because no one's doing this kind of thing, where you personify not only the sound but also the history of New York.'"

"They're just cool tunes," added Daly. "And you don't hear them a lot so it's nice to showcase them. As Jon Davis said when we listened back to a rough mix for the first time in my car, 'There are not a lot of people making records like this now.' And that's kind of true because everybody's doing originals now, which is great, too. But it's not in fashion so much right now to be swinging. So I kind of like that we did."

Ballantyne happened to be in attendance at Dizzy's for the *Vuvu For Frances* record release party in late August. As Daly recalled, "She was at a table of 12 and had eight other people around at other tables. So she had at least 20 people there that night. She's got a better social life than I do. She has a very active life at 98. Frances has gone to see live jazz her whole life and often says, 'Music feeds my soul.' And she is one of the most savvy listeners that I know. Like, she'll come to a gig and say, 'Oh, yes, that was really good. But I don't think the drummer was really listening.' She'll make some astute and mostly true comments like that."

Daly described their Dizzy's engagement as a dream gig for her. "The first set we did was off the hook, maybe the best gig I ever had. Because I got to stand there at Dizzy's next to George playing tunes for Frances. It's very deep for me personally."

Said her one-time teacher Garzone, "Claire's playing on this record and at our Dizzy's gig was the best I ever heard her play. She really stepped up to the plate. And I told her afterwards, 'Let's think about the next one.' And she was flabbergasted."

—Bill Milkowski

'When you hear him on "Mood Indigo" on the new album, it's just so deep. That tune just slays me.' **—Claire Daly on George Garzone**

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PHOTO: RACHEL PAPO

MICHAEL JACKSON

Calligram founders Geof Bradfield (left) and Chad McCullough are dedicated to putting out physical product.

Allies Bradfield, McCullough Launch Calligram Records

TEXAS TENORIST GEOF BRADFIELD'S PLAY-ing possesses a steely grandeur and deep sophistication. He's grown a formidable rep in Chicago, the town where he performs consistently and calls home, and beyond. DownBeat met with Bradfield at the Green Mill, where he regularly leads multiple projects including the Leadbelly tribute Our Roots and the loose-but-tight nonet Yes, and … Music for Nine Improvisers. At press time he was preoccupied with perhaps his most ambitious aggregation to date, the 12-piece Colossal Abundance.

At the Mill in September he was seasoning the sardonic songs of pianist Ben Sidran with skewering blues solos, but a couple weeks prior he'd showcased a quintet he calls Quaver with cohorts Clark Sommers, Dana Hall and Scott Hesse plus Russ Johnson, a Milwaukee trumpeter who enjoys superb rapport with Bradfield.

It's another top-rank trumpeter, however — Chad McCullough — with whom Bradfield chose to partner in a new venture, Calligram Records. The 40-something McCullough was the 50-something Bradfield's student at University of Idaho at the century's turn. "He was tough," recalled McCullough. "He'd say, 'I'd fire you if you played like that in my band.'" But McCullough was no slouch and is now widely regarded for his stunning, chilled lyricism and compositional acuity, as heard on *The Charm Of Impossibilities*, featuring Jon Deitemyer, Jon Irabagon and Larry Kohut, which joins the eponymous *Quaver* as one of four initial releases on Calligram.

"A calligram represents the thing, but is not the thing," Bradfield philosophizes, "without getting into semiotic theory, which is the purview of my wife [art historian Amy Mooney]." Bradfield aspires to document projects at peak performance, and there are discrepancies between live energy and studio precision. An opportunity to perform with the Quaver quintet in Portugal at the Guimarães Festival in 2019 for two weeks sharpened the band's repertoire, and Bradfield was confident the band was captured at a high-level; sadly, the live digital files were corrupted. Undaunted, the group recorded at the Mill in October 2021. "It was a special time, folk were excited to come out again before Omicron hit, there was serious energy in the room, yet you could hear a pin drop when Dana was hand drumming [on the ballad] 'Naõ Faz Mal.'"

Consistent with the Calligram conceit that a recording is but a simulacrum of the real experience, "quite different, socially and sonically," as Bradfield puts it, he underscores, "There was a hysterical bathroom scene at the Mill during the recording."

The restroom is right next to the stage at the legendary venue and manager Jason Cole had to interrupt proceedings to quell a disturbance with, "Hey, we're trying to make a record here!"

Though Bradfield gauged that the material from the Mill was good for a couple of releases, he elected to complete the album with three concise tracks from a session at Ken Christianson's Pro Musica Studio, including "Solid Jackson," a nod to Charlie Haden, his mentor at CalArts back in the '90s. "Charlie would say these curious post-Civil War things when he saw you in the hall, 'Solid Jackson' being one," he said.

The unlikely decision to start a new imprint, producing short initial runs of 500 CDs per artist, in an era when physical copies sell slowly, suited the temperament of both Bradfield and McCullough, who had good experiences with John Bishop's Seattle-based Origin label.

"John was very helpful," McCullough recalled. "I worked at Origin for 10 years on web graphics, digitizing the catalogue, doing A&R, shipping promo."

With no formal training beyond encouragement from Bishop, McCullough worked on design projects on the side and has produced more that 150 CD packages, including layout, branding and imagery for Calligram.

Even though a primary concern is "putting the thing you love in the hands of somebody you trust," as Bradfield sees self-production, Calligram's 50/50 partners are concerned with paying back.

They already do this as educators, Bradfield at Northern Illinois University and McCullough at DePaul and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. But, galvanized by the uplifting vibe of the Chicago scene, they wanted to shed light on distinguished peers and up-and-comers. In the latter category comes saxophonist Arman Sangalang, a student of Bradfield. "He's a great player and a beautiful writer and, rather than some famous guy, we thought he should be part of the family," insisted McCullough. Sangalang joins Chicago vets Matt Ulery and Dave Miller for his debut. In the former category is *Reveal*, a rare leader release by Johnson, in spell-binding cahoots with violin marvel Mark Feldman, Ethan Philion and Tim Daisy.

Calligram will chase up the initial releases with the Scott Hesse Trio's *Intention*, a Feldman-meets-pianist-Steve Million date dubbed *Perfectly Spaced* and a live date at Wisconsin's storied Uptowner bar with drummer Dave Bayless, Johnson and bassist Clay Schaub.

"I'll also be releasing *Atlantic Road Trip* with Glaswegian saxophonist Paul Towndrow and Slovakian vibraphonist Miro Herak," mentioned McCullough.

"We wanted to see how the sausage was made," says Bradfield, referencing all the elements that go into publicity, manufacturing and design, "inspired by such DIY pioneers from Chicago as the AACM, Dave Rempis, Mike Reed and Josh Berman, Nick Mazarella and Chris Anderson from the JRAC. It's not a charity, it's business, but it's giving back to your musical community."

With Bradfield handling marketing, mailing and bookkeeping duties, and McCullough in charge of design aspects and streaming platforms, the two are allied in putting out physical product. "One day ChatGPT and all these technological devices will begin to eat each other from the inside out," Bradfield said. "Instead of being trained to be distracted, we'll all be free and go back to sitting down and paying attention to music and having conversations about it. At least, that's our Luddite fantasy." —*Michael Jackson*

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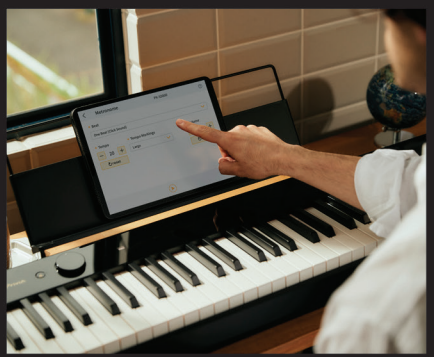

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SHERVIN LAINEZ

"I like the idea of being able to daydream about something for a while," says bassist Todd Sickafoose about making his new recording, *Bear Proof*.

Todd Sickafoose's Bear Daydreams

TODD SICKAFOOSE IS AT HIS PARENTS' place in the Bay Area. He just returned from camping, fitting considering the title of his latest release, *Bear Proof* (Secret Hatch), the long, long-awaited follow-up to his 2008 album *Tiny Resistors* (Cryptogramophone), the collaborative-compositional tour de force that redefined possibilities for mid-sized jazz chamber groups.

"People have asked, 'Why so long?'" Sickafoose says, regarding the 15-year gap between albums. "I don't have a great answer, except that life is full of other things for me … not just other music but also life, and family and moving." He relocated back to the West Coast from Brooklyn in 2010, ultimately landing in Eugene, Oregon, when his wife accepted a faculty position at the University of Oregon in 2014. One of his "other music" projects happened to earn him both a Tony (2019) and Grammy (2020), as the orchestrator for the hit musical *Hadestown*.

Not to mention his main gig as bassist for singer-songwriter Ani DiFranco, who first heard Sickafoose in 2003 in the opening act for one of her tours, and after recording with him, invited him to tour with her as a duo.

Sickafoose maintains a distinctive identity as a composer-arranger across the spectrum of style and genre. He favors a group of seven to eight players: a tiny orchestra, layered yet nimble. "That seventh or eighth person just explodes the number of combinations, of duos and trios. … You just scratch the surface of that with an hour's worth of music."

His orchestrations sound nothing like the music-school arranging templates propagated within the music/television/film industry. That's not uncommon for those who studied music, as he did at California Institute of the Arts in the Los Angeles area. And while CalArts Animation is a hive for the worker bees of Disney and Pixar, its music department is steadfast in having its students create a decidedly artistic rather than commercial product. Sickafoose plans to do a clinic there when he brings *Bear Proof* to Los Angeles for the Angel City Jazz Festival. "I was thinking this is good timing, because this is the most CalArts thing I've ever done," he muses.

He ruminated on *Bear Proof* for a year; dreaming and journaling, before attempting to notate it. "I like the idea of being able to daydream about something for a while," he says. "John Luther Adams [another composer and CalArts alum] talks a lot about how an idea can feel more … free, when it's just a loose idea, and the moment you try to speak of the idea it becomes a bit shackled by language, the baggage of the particular words that you choose. Sometimes music can be like that, too. … You start having these 'fast ideas,' the kind of ideas that we use when we're playing and improvising, instead of the 'slow ideas' which are more outside of those bounds. Adams talks about trying to keep music that he's working on in his imagination for as long as possible before writing anything down. I don't know if I'm any good at it, but I tried to do that a little bit with this."

Sickafoose imagined a folk-chamber ensemble performing a suite of pieces continuously for over an hour. The band: violinist Jenny Scheinman, guitarist Adam Levy, clarinetist Ben Goldberg, cornetist Kirk Knuffke, Rob Reich on accordion, pianist Erik Deutsch, Alison Miller on drums and the composer on bass, rehearsed for a few days before a mini-tour in California, playing the piece quite a few times before going into the studio and recording it exactly the same way: live, no stops, no overdubs. Like a one-act theater production.

"You get that energy of being a couple of minutes, or 20 minutes or 40 minutes into something so you're deep into it, listening in a different way than we sometimes are in the studio," says Sickafoose. "There's a violin solo that Jenny plays … I feel like she gets to a place that I've heard her get to 100 times, standing next to her on a stage — this kind of swirling thing that she can do — and it's very hard to capture that on a recording, but because we were playing for a long time … we got there. I feel really proud of having helped to do that."

Scheinman is one of Sickafoose's longest working collaborators. They started playing together in San Francisco in the late '90s and early 2000s, both ending up in New York after that, extending their circle to envelop the other artists who play on *Bear Proof*. Alison Miller joined DiFranco's band in 2005, as would Scheinman, inevitably. They all found themselves in Miller's group Boom Tic Boom, along with Goldberg and Knuffke, who played together for the first time in 2014 — with *Bear Proof*, making this release and tour in 2023 the opening of a time capsule (or bear cannister).

"I feel so excited by the things I've learned from … [all] these people who I'm actually making this stuff with — they're my biggest influences," says Sickafoose. "People use the term 'code switching' — you can kind of code switch as a musician when you find yourself in different realms, but it's more the way you're thinking and talking about the music, because a lot of times the actual playing of the music and the experiencing of the music is unified.

"That's how I feel about all these things for me. Playing with Ani DiFranco, working on *Hadestown*, *Bear Proof*, they all feel unified to me in an aesthetic sense of actually doing the work. The only difference is interfacing with other people; you speak a slightly different language about how you're working on it."

—Gary Fukushima

KIRAN AHLUWALIA

Naya Baaz is guitarist Rez Abassi, left, and sitarist Josh Feinberg.

Presenting the Worldly Jazz Beat of Naya Baaz

SINCE MOVING TO NEW YORK CITY IN 1987, veteran guitarist-composer Rez Abbasi has been a boundary-pushing presence on the scene. Born in Karachi, Pakistan, his family moved when he was 4 to Southern California, where he later attended USC and studied with guitar great Joe Diorio, who encouraged a 21-year-old Abbasi to make the move to the Big Apple.

Aside from countless gigs and projects over the past three decades as both sideman and leader — including three recordings with alto saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa as a member of the Indo-Pak Coalition — Abbasi has released a slew of adventurous recordings ranging from fusion-oriented fare (1995's *Third Ear* on Ozone) to searing post-bop (1998's *Modern Memory*). Playing strictly acoustic guitar on 2015's *Intents And Purposes* (Enja), he turned a nostalgic nod to his '70s fusion heroes John McLaughlin, Pat Martino, Larry Coryell and others. And his acclaimed 2020 release, *Django-Shift* (Whirlwind), radically recontextualized the music of gypsy jazz icon Django Reinhardt.

Along the way, Abbasi has hinted at melding Indian music and jazz, most notably on 2005's *Snake Charmer* and 2006's *Bazaar*, both of which found him playing a customized Jerry Jones Sitar-Guitar in an organ trio setting with drummer Dan Weiss doubling on tabla. His wife, Indian singer Kiran Ahluwalia, contributed Punjabi vocals and tanpura drones on those seminal hybrid offerings. His latest manifestation of jazz-meets-Indian music is *Charm* (Whirlwind), his first release since receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship for Composition in 2021.

Abbasi collaborates with California-based, New York-born sitarist Josh Feinberg on a groundbreaking project dubbed Naya Baaz. Feinberg, a former bassist who studied with Dave Holland, shifted to Hindustani music while attending New England Conservatory, later studying with sitar maestro Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. The East-meets-West Naya Baaz includes five-string cellist Jennifer Vincent and versatile drummer Satoshi Takeishi.

"As someone with a background in both jazz and Indian classical music, I'm able to draw upon my varied training and musical lexicons to bridge the gap between these two musics," said Feinberg. "It's more about allowing the walls to come down between these two vocabularies."

"People like to compare it to Shakti," added Abbasi. "But I feel like that's like comparing painters from different times. Shakti has established a particular facet of the jazz-meets-Indian music thing. Whereas, Naya Baaz is really dealing through a different paradigm. Throughout the whole record there's a lot more chromaticism than you'll hear on any other sort of Indian-meets-jazz record. That was our paradigm: How can we extend chromatic melodic material and chromatic harmonic material?"

The "X" factor in Naya Baaz's exotic formula is Feinberg's unprecedented sitar playing. "Noone has played these kinds of chromatic melodies and harmonies on sitar before," said Abbasi. "That's the revelatory factor of this band. The music on *Charm* is not necessarily just a world music album, it's a jazz record. And the way that Josh plays the sitar is opening new doors within the jazz canon."

As Feinberg explained, "I worked with a luthier to add frets to the instrument at various places to both increase the range and allow chromatic fretting for larger areas of the instrument. I also worked with him to create an instrument that would play in tune up the neck on more than one string and lower the string height, which allows easier string crossing (not a widely used technique in traditional sitar playing), which facilitates chromaticism, arpeggiation and other Western melodic devices."

A student of the Maihar Gharana school of playing, Feinberg is one of the first American-born sitarists to earn the love and respect of Hindustani music connoisseurs. While he alludes to a more traditional Indian raga sound on only two pieces from *Charm* — the folkloric "Bhairavi" and the duet "Peony" — he engages in more richly harmonic territory and dazzling leaps of chromaticism (both uncharacteristic for Indian music) on pieces like the high-energy, Mahavishnuesque "Behkayal (Without A Thought)," the complex "Chick's Magnet" and the thoughtful "No Lack There Of."

"Josh and I focused on creating a polyphonic landscape as opposed to a monophonic one, which is more often heard in crossover jazz/world projects," Abbasi explained. "There's all kinds of keys rolling through these tunes, and it's striking how he was able to deal with that and allow me the freedom to write whatever I wanted. And he's helping me build my solos with his harmonic intentions."

Feinberg and Abbasi had originally met through the jazz and Indian music worlds over the course of years. "During the pandemic I reached out to Rez to create a collaboration," said Feinberg. "I felt that at this point in my career I had established myself as an authentic and reputable traditional performer, and it was now time for me to explore some more collaborative endeavors. We would send each other clips and add, edit or supplement the other's ideas. After about eight months of this, I flew to New York, and we took a week together to collaborate in person and compose the tunes for the album."

The two forged an easy partnership, pulling together a coherent hybrid sound while expanding each other's compositional ideas. "Make It So," a piece originally inspired by the chromatic lines of Bach, was expanded by the guitarist's harmonic input. "Emancipation," originally written by Feinberg on piano, was also further developed during the writing process by Abbasi.

"The thing with Indian music and jazz is that they are both fortified by improvisation," said Abbasi, "so it makes sense that they find a place to live together. Shakti did it their way, and I feel like Naya Baaz is capturing it in our own unique way."

"Both musics use microtones, both use motivic development, both use improvisation, interplay, call-and-response, solo/accompanist paradigms, scales, virtuosity and musical depth," added Feinberg. "This is a parable for life: There's far more that unites us than divides us."

—Bill Milkowski

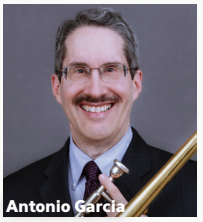
Riffs

ECM's Latest Classic Drops: ECM Records has announced another batch of digitized hi-res releases from early in its catalog. The latest titles include Jan Garbarek, Edward Vesala and Arild Andersen, *Triptykon*; Chick Corea, Dave Holland and Barry Altschul, *A.R.C.*; Tomasz Stanko, Tomasz Szukalski, Dave Holland and Edward Vesala, *Balladyna*; Jack DeJohnette's Special Edition, *Inflation Blues*; Eberhard Weber, *The Colours Of Chloe*; David Darling, *Journal October–Solo Cello*; Paul Motian, *Conception Vessel*; Ralph Towner with Glen Moore, *Trios/Solos*; Egberto Gismonti, *Sol Do Meio Dia*; Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, Hugh Davies, Jamie Muir and Christine Jeffrey, *The Music Improvisation Company*; Stanley Cowell Trio, *Illusion Suite*; Edward Vesala, *Nan Madol*; and Barre Phillips, *Mountainscapes*. ecmrecords.com

Edward Simon Named Fellow: Venezuelan pianist Edward Simon has been named a 2023 Lucas Artist Fellow. Out of 370 applicants, 65–30 in visual arts, 19 in literary arts and 16 in music/composition and performing arts received fellowships. Lucas Fellows are identified through an international nomination process that ensures support for "highly qualified, and often under recognized, artists who have the potential to become major voices in the next generation of creative thinkers." Each fellow is offered a three-month residency to be used at their discretion over a three-year period between October 2023 and 2026. The residency site is located in Montalvo's 175-acre public park in Silicon Valley. montalvoarts.org

Edward Simon

Garcia Receives Medal of Honor: In December, longtime jazz educator Antonio García will receive The Medal of Honor from The Midwest Clinic, the world's largest international music conference. The Medal of Honor was introduced in 1962 "as a way to honor conductors, educators, composers and others whose unique service to music education and continuing influence on the development and improvement of bands and orchestras deserve special recognition." More than 100 individuals have received the award since its inception. midwestclinic.org


Antonio Garcia

In Memoriam: Charles Gayle, 1939–2023

CHARLES GAYLE, A TENOR AND ALTO SAXophonist who arose from long-term homelessness to become a key member of jazz's avant-garde in the 1990s, died Sept. 5 in Brooklyn, New York. He was 84. Cause of death was not specified; however, Gayle had, for several years, been afflicted with Alzheimer's disease.

Frequently untethered to tonality or time, Gayle's sound on the saxophone (he also played piano, bass and bass clarinet) was coarse and frequently shrieking, but he also could apply a remarkably soft voice.

Gayle became a force in free-jazz only after decades of indigence. He spent the 1970s and '80s busking on the streets and in the subway stations of New York, living in a squat on Manhattan's Lower East Side — apparently by choice.

Charles Ennis Gayle Jr. was born Feb. 28, 1939, in Buffalo, New York. He rarely talked about his early life — history and identity were among the things he shed for his art.

After a brief stint at Fredonia State Teachers College, Gayle began working as a musician in Buffalo. He made a recording in 1965 released 50 years later as *Gayle Force*. He moved to New York City in the early '70s and promptly disappeared from the record.

"I had to shed my history, my life," he said. "Everything had to stop right there."

Gayle resurfaced in 1988 recording three albums with bassist Sirone that put him on the jazz map. He toured Europe with bassist William Parker, and in 1991 recorded the seminal *Touchin' On Trane* with Parker and drummer Rashied Ali. From there, Gayle built a formidable career, working with Cecil Taylor, Sunny Murray, Parker and Ali. In 1996, his list of notable collaborators grew to include punk-rock icon Henry Rollins, who used Gayle and Ali on his album *Everything*. Gayle became known for playing saxophone while wearing clownface makeup and a red nose. In the 2000s, he began recording acclaimed works for solo piano as well. *—Michael J. West*

MICHAEL JACKSON
Gayle at HotHouse in Chicago

In Memoriam: Curtis Fowlkes, 1950–2023

TROMBONIST CURTIS FOWLKES, ONE OF the most sought-after sidemen in jazz and other genres, passed away on Aug. 31 from heart failure in Brooklyn, New York. He was 73.

He released only one album as the sole leader, *Reflect* (Knitting Factory), in 1999, but was a valued foundation in the horn sections of others. Fowlkes came to prominence as the co-founder, with Roy Nathanson, of the Jazz Passengers in the 1990s after a successful stint in John Lurie's hip, downtown group the Lounge Lizards, which led to a career spent criss-crossing cultures, boundaries and musical styles.

In August, Jazz Passengers Music Projects organized a GoFundMe page to help Fowlkes' family deal with the trombonist's palliative/hospice care due to congestive heart failure.

"His musician colleagues have all been touched by his warmth, humor, virtuosity and intelligence on the bandstand," read the intro to the page. "His listeners and fans have been touched by the same qualities that come through with such immediacy in his gorgeous and ebullient trombone playing."

Fuller was a member of Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra and Steven Bernstein's Millennial Territory Orchestra as well as working with Bill Frisell, Henry Threadgill, Don Byron, Glen Hansard, Charlie Hunter, Roy Nathanson, Marc Ribot and many others.

"He was a soft-spoken, beautiful man who could make gorgeous things fly or sometimes float out of a trombone," Lurie wrote in a social media post.

"One of the deepest and kindest to ever do it," said Charlie Hunter. "It was an honor and a privilege to share the stage with your sound that went back 100 years and went forward even more."

—Frank Alkyer

MICHAEL JACKSON
Curtis Fowlkes

RI SUTHERLAND-COHEN

In addition to his more than 3,000 recording credits across multiple genres and styles, Davis was a longtime and widely respected music educator.

In Memoriam: Richard Davis, 1930–2023

RICHARD DAVIS, A BASSIST WHOSE VIRTUosity was equaled by his astounding versatility, died Sept. 6 in Madison, Wisconsin. He was 93.

His death was confirmed by his daughter, Persia, who created an online memorial page that Thursday. Cause of death was not given; however, Davis had for some time been in ill health, spending his final two years in hospice care.

A Chicago native, Davis came up in the Windy City's robust post-World War II jazz scene. However, he was a classically trained player, and worked regularly in that context as well as in Broadway pit orchestras, film and television, commercial jingles and pop music crossovers. Indeed, Davis is perhaps most famous for his work on Van Morrison's seminal 1968 folk-rock album *Astral Weeks*. His other collaborators included Leonard Bernstein, Igor Stravinsky and Bruce Springsteen.

Even within the jazz genre, however, Davis was remarkable for his ability to adapt to seemingly any style. His work as an accompanist ran the gamut from Sarah Vaughan and Frank Sinatra to Eric Dolphy and the Thad Jones–Mel Lewis Orchestra. In each circumstance he evidenced an immediately distinctive sound: a physical, percussive authority, precise intonation and pointed use of the instrument's entire range. The DownBeat International Critics Poll rated him top bassist every year from 1967 to '74.

"I've done some great things," he acknowledged in a 2019 interview. "I've had some phenomenal associations with some great composers, conductors, colleagues and the whole bit."

In addition to his more than 3,000 recording credits across multiple genres and styles — including more than a dozen jazz albums under his own name — Davis was a longtime and widely respected musical educator. He spent four decades teaching bass, improvisation and jazz history at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, retiring when he was well into his 80s.

He also founded the Richard Davis Foundation, a nonprofit that provides networking and performing opportunities for young bassists from around the world.

Richard Davis was born April 15, 1930, in Chicago, growing up on the city's South Side. As a child, he and his two elder brothers formed a vocal trio with a cousin as conductor; Richard sang the lowest part, which sparked his interest in the bass. His study of the instrument took him to Chicago's DuSable High School, where he was a student of legendary educator Captain Walter Dyett, who encouraged Davis to join the Youth Orchestra of Greater Chicago. Davis then attended VanderCook College of Music, where he studied with Chicago Symphony Orchestra bassist Rudolf Fahsbender.

Davis began playing with Chicago pianist Ahmad Jamal in 1952, then in 1954 embarked for New York. He worked with pianist Don Shirley for two years before being hired by vocalist Sarah Vaughan, with whom he finished out the 1950s. During his time with Vaughan, Davis built a prolific career as a freelance bassist, working in music of every variety. His credits included Kenny Burrell's *A Night At The Vanguard* (1959), John Lewis' *Essence* (1962), Andrew Hill's *Point Of Departure* and Eric Dolphy's *Out To Lunch* (both 1964). In 1966, he became the founding bassist in the Thad Jones–Mel Lewis Orchestra, where he remained until 1972.

In addition to *Astral Weeks*, Davis recorded pop and rock albums with Springsteen, Laura Nyro and Paul Simon. He also worked in the classical arena with Leopold Stokowski, Pierre Boulez and Gunther Schuller in addition to Stravinsky and Bernstein.

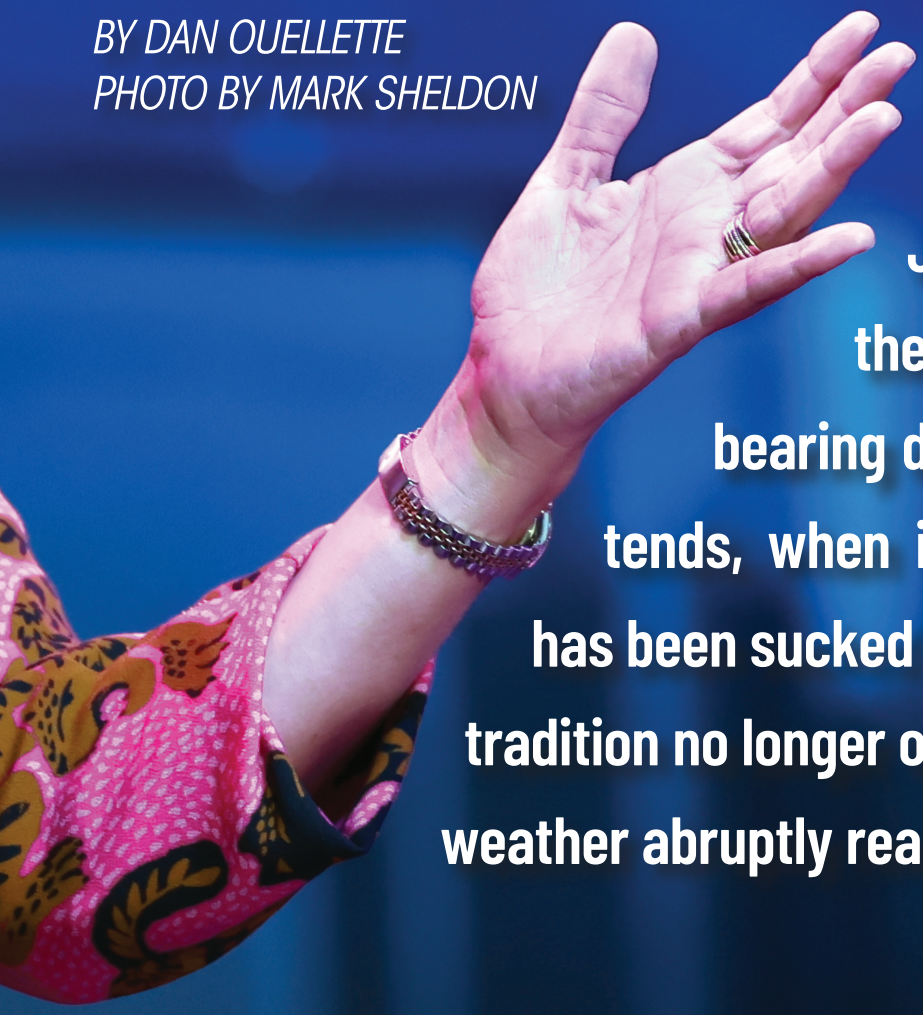
Davis had become one of the most respected and in-demand bass players in the world when he finally accepted one of many offers from the University of Wisconsin in 1977. While he then built an equally formidable reputation as an educator, Davis also became an activist, founding the Madison chapter of the Institutes for the Healing of Racism. He received an NEA Jazz Masters fellowship in 2014. In 2018, the city of Madison named a street after him.

In accordance with Davis' wishes, there will be no public funeral or memorial.

—Michael J. West

LUCIANA SOUZA
CHASING COMETS

BY DAN OUELLETTE
PHOTO BY MARK SHELDON



Just when it feels like the darkened clouds are bearing down with ominous portends, when it feels that the music has been sucked dry in sorrow, when the tradition no longer offers anticipation — the weather abruptly realigns.

ARNALDO PAPPALARDO

Souza with, from left, Trio Corrente, Fabio Torres, Paulo Paulelli and Edu Ribeiro

The fronts cease to battle but swirl into a wonderful open-sky, high-pressure zone. In its early-morning glory, the aurora of daylight breaks through with a novel canvas that calls for a colorful impression and untrodden pathways.

And in Brazil-born, Los Angeles-based esteemed singer Luciana Souza's world, we're talking galactic on her first-time collaboration with the renowned Trio Corrente. It's a monumental shift sweetened with Brazilian classics and originals in the samba spirit.

Cometa (Sunnyside Records) translates from Portuguese into the English word *comet* — a rare fascination of celestial fire and ice and awe of the falling star with a long tail orbiting the sun in an elliptical path.

"We wanted to title the record that would explain what it is we're doing," says Souza. "Hey, it's a comet that's passing through. Check it out. Would you miss going out to see it if someone told you it was coming through? It's the title of the last song on the album, which is a ballad. We used it so the title wouldn't sound didactic. We are entertaining with meaning."

The comet's birth arrived when Souza and Trio Correnta — pianist Fabio Torres, bassist Paulo Paulelli, drummer Edu Ribeiro — came together to celebrate the break from the depression and desolation Brazil had recently experienced when the pandemic combined with a disastrous presidency. Their goal was to turn the page into a cheerful affair with the pleasures of making Brazilian music as a community. That's at the heart *Cometa* — not just another relief recording from the pandemic, but a social uplifting from the tragic politics in their homeland.

"It's not just my album," says Souza, whose discography is expansive. "It's an album that's about all of us."

From January 2019 to December 2022, havoc reigned in Brazil's political sphere with Jair Bolsonaro, a retired military officer, decidedly right-wing and a bold authoritarian, serving as president.

Bolsonaro branded social protestors as terrorists deserving jail and death; he scaled back the country's protocols for the indigenous people in the Amazon rainforest, which resulted in widespread deforestation; and, most infamously, he downplayed the pandemic as nothing more than the common flu. He frowned on vaccines and wearing masks. The outbreaks of the coronavirus, in the most recent estimates, resulted in more than 700,000 Brazilian deaths — one of the world's worst in terms of national casualties.

This and other illegal actions resulted in Bolsonaro being defeated by Brazil's former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in the 2022 elections, and Bolsonaro eventually being charged by the Brazilian electoral court with abuse of power and forbidden to run for any offices until 2030.

The ramp-up to the inauguration was marred by military attempts to interfere. They were quelled. Harmony prevailed.

On the day of Lula da Silva's inauguration, the optimistic Souza arrived in her one-time hometown of São Paulo to record a fresh, Portuguese-sung album of new joy and new vision for the legendary Brazilian tradition. The goal was the continuing search for peace.

"The three of us had a connection with little bits of recording over the years," says Souza, who notes that this is the first time in her

recording career where she played with a standard trio. "The members of Trio Correnta were all interested in the celebration of hope in Brazil with the power of Brazilian songs and the expression of jazz."

Torres struck a chord with Souza when he invited her to tour with him in the fall of 2022. It was an immediate joint decision to come up with a plan to work with the trio to record. Souza set out to jumpstart a collaborative project with the trio known for its 20-year achievement as Brazil's top instrumental band, a reputation earned through its mastery of styles from choro to popular Brazilian music.

"We wanted to push Brazilian music deeper into jazz," says Souza. "This trio is perfect. They've developed their own language. What grabs me is the facility of how they play so well together. The groove is there but so is the relaxation. We're expanding the music in terms of the freedom it allows."

A key historical influence to the project was the '60s instrumental ensemble Zimbo Trio that collaborated with bossa nova vocalists Elis Regina and Jair Rodrigues de Oliveira in a search for musical fearlessness. "They were on the weekly TV show *O Fino Da Bossa* beginning in 1965 through '68," Souza says. "Everyone watched them. It was like a variety show. And Elis would come to the studio, learn the songs in the afternoon and arrange them on the spot for the show. That spirit was so relaxed and fun as she played with the trio's virtuosos. Every show spotlighted Elis. They were playing with a jazz attitude. Everyone was working the songs out and playing like it was a party. They gave us the tips we needed to create *Cometa*."

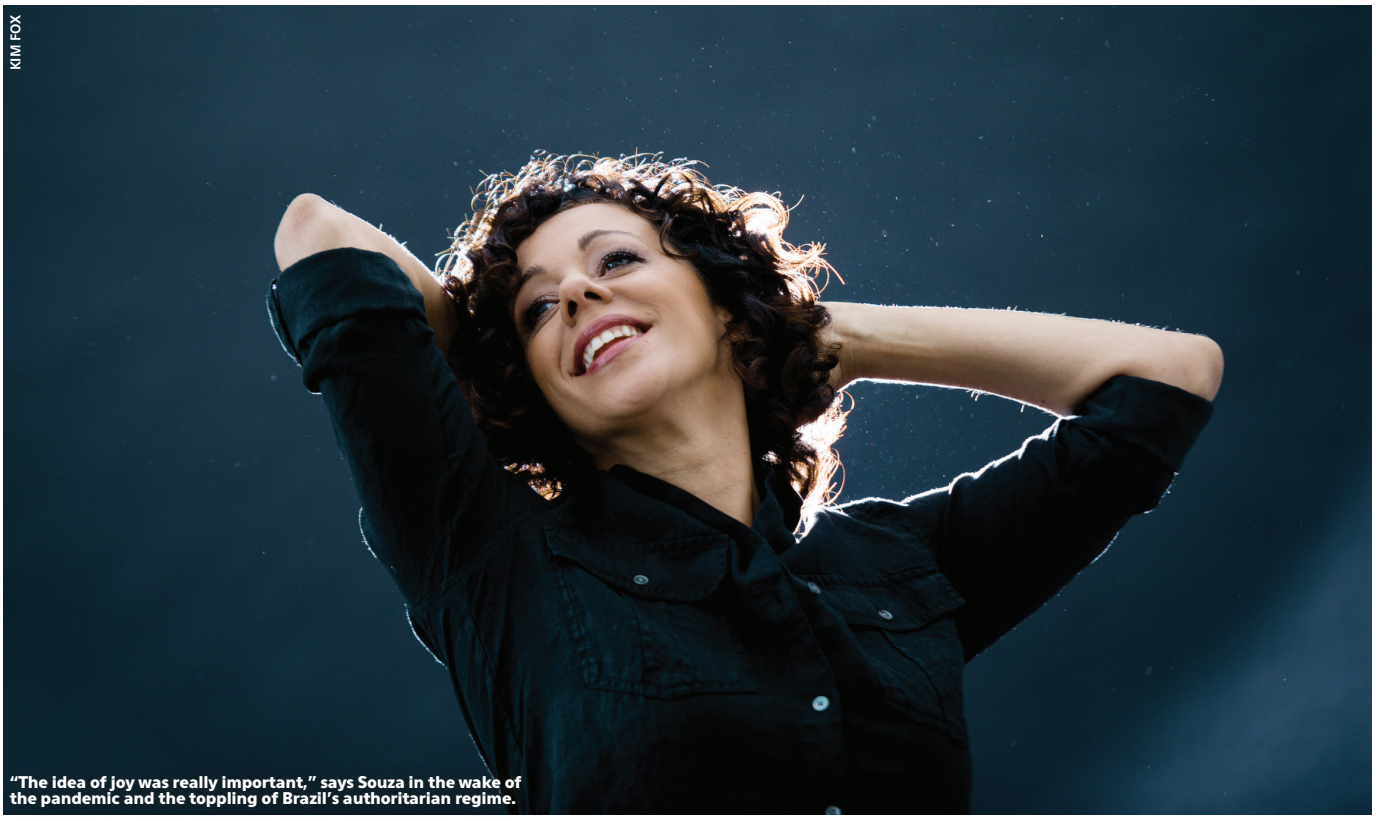
The plan combined a swirl of the simple and complex. The foursome began having Zoom meetings on repertoire and arrangements. They agreed to honor in their own improvisational voices Brazilian song heroes, including the classic bossa nova team of Antônio Carlos Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes, songwriter great Ary Barroso, singer-songwriter Djavan, sambista Paulinho da Viola and the legendary bossa nova inspiration Dorival Caymmi.

Two of Caymmi's tunes make it onto *Cometa*. His "Você Já Foi À Bahia" (a spirited celebration of the Bahai region) serves as the opening track and is arranged by Souza. She sails into the album with fire, her buoyant voice and flowing scats held afloat by the rising heat of the band. The expressive support focuses on the confluence of conversation and listening.

The song serves as an introduction to Souza's characteristic embrace of poetry, melody, passion, elegance, transcendence, romanticism, wistfulness and melancholy in her always sublime vocal delivery. Former collaborator Lionel Loueke says, "She jumps in immediately wherever you go. She's not afraid to get lost. She goes for it."

Part two of the album-production strategy required each member to contribute a new song in sync with the sentiment. "I love writing on assignment with deadlines," Souza says. "Everyone had to have originals with arrangements. Deadline was Dec. 20. Everyone was so busy, but I said I needed everything because I was going to be on a plane in two weeks to record the album with them. So before I left, we all had each other's arrangements." She contributed the spirited "Bem Que Te Avisei," about a suitor for a woman who's already committed to a relationship.

The trio jumped into action. "That's the way Trio Corrente always works on a new project," says drummer Edu Ribeiro. "We bring songs and arrangements from everyone. We were so impressed with the way that Lu fits into that and made the music come to life so easily. She brought a beautiful musical affair to create this fresh vibe with her tune that has alluring arrangements. And she also composed lyrics to


KIM FOX

"The idea of joy was really important," says Souza in the wake of the pandemic and the toppling of Brazil's authoritarian regime.

'I USE MUSIC AS MY COMPANION WHILE THE COMET MAKES ME AWARE.'

one of my originals, the ballad 'Cometa,' that I arranged. We sounded as if we had played for 20 years together."

They all met in São Paulo and spent a day going over the arrangements as a means of preparing for two short studio dates to record. "Recording with Luciana is easy," says Ribeiro. "She is a perfect one-take singer and musician."

"The idea of joy was really important," says Souza. "So we could play the sambas and be playful. Let's get the spirit going. We don't play enough of that kind of music. I've spent a lot of my career recording albums with darkness and sorrows. I fought against that on this album. This is tipping our hats to the old composers who had crazy break-up humor. We're playing live music with that spirit, like going back to the idea of how Zimbo Trio and Elis Regina played."

The samba-drenched *Cometa* dips into the blues, runs with a percussive beat, leaps into tempo changes, offers straight-up melodic beauty and breaks with celestial vocals.

"Recordings are always a special moment," says Ribeiro. "It's really serious, demands a lot of energy and concentration, but it has to be joyous and relaxed all the time. Any mood that we put on the record is going to be delivered 100% to the listeners, to their ears and hearts. We always try to serve something enjoyable for them."

A key member of the recording team resided thousands of miles away, back in Los Angeles. Larry Klein, Souza's husband and the father of their 15-year-old son, Noah, served as the producer using the software program Audiomovers, which allowed him to hear the sessions simultaneously from his home studio. "This was a lesson in how to turn the tradition on its head but still hold on to the important elements," Klein says. "I know the guys from the trio, and they are the best of the new crop of Brazilian musicians. I'd say that Luciana was the driving force to putting this all together. I learned a lot. I didn't know about how lyrical Dorival Caymmi was. For me, that's part of what I love about my job."

"We all played an informal session, making choices and taking care about details with Larry after," Ribeiro notes. "Even having a 'bi-continental' recording session, we had such a great time together as we are in the same space with a high level of commitment to the music."

"At times it was challenging," Klein says. "Everyone there is conversing in Portuguese, so at times during the conversations, I'd ask Lu, what are we talking about? But everyone works at such a high level that my only dia-

logue was on structured elements. Lu and I had discussed the arrangements before she went to Brazil. So I made my suggestions. But, really, our goal was to go for a live record feel — not work things into some polished form. We wanted to capture the spontaneous element."

In the end, what *Cometa* means to Souza is a reminder of the hardship her country had gone through previously. Nothing is overtly political in the tunes, she says, but "the spirit of this album is political, in a way. It's about helping each other out, to be resilient, to be in the resistance as jazz musicians. We know the hardships."

Cometa goes much deeper for Souza than the recent setbacks. From her birth in São Paulo, she lived under a military dictatorship. It began in 1964 and ended in 1985, putting a stranglehold on the cultural vitality of the country. Dissidents were killed, imprisoned, persecuted and exiled.

Luciana, the daughter of songwriter-singer-guitarist Walter Santos Souza and poet/singer Teresa Souza, two prominent leaders in the bossa movement, remembers well the regime's oppression that stripped away artists' freedom of expression. Before being released, every song had to be approved by government censors.

"We lived through hardships," Souza says. "When I was very young I remember the military taking my mother away for three days. She came home fearful. We couldn't visit people, and we used codes. We couldn't speak about things within the family. We had hushed conversations. But we did hide people and feed them. And really, the song became the most powerful weapon of youth against the dictatorship. Music saved us."

After Souza arrived in the U.S., attending Berklee College of Music and later New England Conservatory of Music, she became a mover. New York City seemed the perfect place for her to sing as a support voice with the likes of Maria Schneider's orchestra and Guillermo Klein's Los Gauchos big band. She became a mature bandleader specializing in duo projects with pianist Edward Simon and guitarist Romero Lubambo. Her rhythmic sensibility allowed her to sing alto swoops and soars with an otherworldly shadow and shine. On each project Souza was not willing to duplicate what came before, and she took wide leaps of faith.

In 2018, Souza recorded her superb song cycle *The Book Of Longing* in addition to collaborating and touring with the fusion band The Yellowjackets in support of their poignant *Raising Our Voice* album.

At the heart of both projects during turbulent political times in the U.S., Souza says she believed that truth as a moral barometer had been tilted the wrong way. In regard to her new solo work, which calls out for inner peace, she says, "It is truth because the music and lyrics are telling about life. It feels like morally we're in a pit as all we've tried to build is being deconstructed right in front of us. I'm hoping the music I make will bring in some stillness in the midst, a time to be honest, to rest, to go inward."

As for *Cometa*, a veil of hopelessness has lifted. "Bolsonaro reminded us of how we lived in the old days," Souza says. "This album serves as a reminder of what can come out of the harshness, out of the darkness. There's still a lot of noise out there, and it's hard to get meaningful music to be heard. But I'm certain people are going to be touched by the joy and uptempo of the jazz here. Even if someone says that it puts them in a good mood, to tap into rejoicing, I understand that. For me, I use music as my companion while the comet makes me aware." **DB**

THE ORCHESTRAL PASSION OF IVAN LINS

BY JOSEF WOODARD PHOTO BY BRUNO BARATA

Five years ago, the mighty Umbria Jazz Festival in Perugia, Italy, paid lavish tribute to Quincy Jones on the occasion of his 80th birthday.

On the festival's opening night, the large arena stage kept sonically active for a few hours, replete with rhythm section, big band and orchestral canvases, on-stage interview segments with Jones and, from the Brazilian contingent of Jones' broad musical life, singer-songwriter Ivan Lins.

In terms of important Brazilian musicians with links to American music, Lins' appearance at Jones' grand party made perfect sense. His signature and oft-covered song "Love Dance" was sent into popular orbit by George Benson on the guitarist's Jones-produced 1980 album *Give Me The Night*. Jones became an instant Lins fan after being introduced to the Brazilian's discography by Los Angeles-based percussionist and first-call studio player Paulinho da Costa.

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FRAN GALA

"I drank too much caipirinha before, and I couldn't sing," Lins says of his first recording session as a vocalist. The next time, he was barred from imbibing.

Soon after, Lins found himself and his career in friendly embrace of Jones. "He's my godfather, musically," Lins says. "He put my music around the world." Reflecting on that evening in Umbria, he comments, "It was amazing that night — orchestra and all."

Despite his legendary status both in Brazilian and American music circles — with a catalog of recorded original songs numbering more than 700 and counting — Lins remains, in some ways, an undersung hero of musical Braziliana of the past half century. Although he possesses a humble and distinctive strength as a singer in his own right, his deepest impact has been in the wings of music, where songwriters dwell.

For a substantial primer in Lins' musical world, proceed to the new album *My Heart Speaks* (Resonance Records), a lush and orchestral treatment of 11 Lins songs spanning a few decades. The musical forces involved include the Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra (from the Republic of Georgia) and cameos by vocalists Diane Reeves, Jane Monheit and newcomer Tawanda, along with trumpeter Randy Brecker — all under the conceptual/producer aegis of Resonance founder George Klabin and arranger Kuno Schmid.

When it comes to preferred settings for his songs, Lins confesses to favoring a bigger-is-better aesthetic. He counts his work with orchestras over the years as his favorite projects. "If I was a rich guy, all my albums would have orchestra or a big band," he laughs. In Tblisi, he says, "The orchestra sounded beautiful, and it was a beautiful theater."

Lins, 78, was at home in Rio de Janerio when DownBeat connected for a phone interview, as he was easing out of a relaxed summer into an upcoming appearance at Sao Paulo's eclectic "The Town" festival.

Seeds of *My Heart Speaks* were inadvertently sown by an earlier Resonance release, the Lins tribute album *Night Kisses: A Tribute To Ivan Lins*. Klaban invited Lins to write notes for the album, in which he praised "the great arrangers — Dave Grusin, Bob James, Josh Nelson and especially Kuno." In turn, Schmid

and Klabin proposed a new, ambitious Lins project, with orchestra in tow. Lins' European agent, Catherine Mayer, recommended the Tblisi orchestra, under the baton of maestro Vakhtang Kakhidze.

When it came to repertoire, Lins intentionally left the curatorial duties to Klabin and Schmid. "I didn't want to suggest songs because I really love my music. Any song they suggested is gonna be great. It was amazing, you know, because I got surprised with some songs like 'Não há Porque,'" a decidedly non-commercial mid-'70s song among many protest songs Lins penned during periods of unrest and dictatorship in Brazil. "I never could even imagine that they were going to choose this song. I was really happy with the songs they chose. That showed me that they have very good taste," he laughs.

Lins' unique, understated vocal style graces several of the songs on *My Heart Speaks*, but the songs take on a different musical character in the vocal embrace of accomplished singers Reeves, Monheit and Tawanda. He is very accustomed to hearing his songs spring to new life via the famous voices of others.

"Everybody thinks that I'm a performer or a pianist," he asserts, "but what I like the most is to write songs. And when I started to write songs, you know, I wasn't a singer. I used to write songs for different people, singers that I was dreaming of. Who knows, maybe Frank Sinatra can record this, or Stevie Wonder, or the great Brazilian singers like Elis Regina," who cut Lins' first hit, "Madalena," later recorded by Ella Fitzgerald.

"Suddenly, they discovered me and started to record me," he says. "I used to have trios or quartets, playing instrumental. And then the songwriter started to take control over me."

His own strange tale of reluctant acceptance of his vocal spotlight comes with coercive libations attached. "Somebody in the record company started saying, 'Why not sing your songs, man?' One day, I remember they knew that I loved caipirinha (a popular Brazilian cocktail, made from cachaça). I start to drink caipirinhas. I was almost drunk when I said yes," he remembers with a laugh. "And the first time I went in the studio to sing, they did the same, and I did the same. I was so scared. I drank too much caipirinha before, and I couldn't sing. We had to postpone the session. On the second, they prohibited me from drinking.

"Then, I started my career as a singer."

One song that leaps out of his catalogue is the wildly popular and frequently covered "Love Dance." Asked about his favorite versions of the song, Lins immediately answers, "One that I like the most is the first one, by George Benson. There's one that I really love, too, by Diana Krall. Nancy Wilson did a great one, too, as did Barbra Streisand, and Shirley Horn did a great version, too.

"I usually do songs for the Brazilian market and the song is almost unknown here. Sometimes, I sing it here and people come and say, 'Oh, it's a new song?' [*laughs*] No, it's from 1979. I never thought that was going to go into the international market. Quincy, with his sensibility, picked up the song and put it with George Benson. It is still one of my favorite songs. I was very inspired doing that song."

Generally, Lins' song catalogue exemplifies the delicate balance of melodic, infectious and often romantic expression with subtle harmonic shifts or other signs of exploration. The accessible-adventurous impulse can be linked to such other Brazilian songwriters as Antonio Carlos Jobim and Caetano Veloso, going back to the 1960s. "Well, with that generation, at that time, we had a dictatorship," Lins says. "We had to fight against the censorship and to go around the bush, with the censorship. We had to be very creative.

"With the bossa nova, people started to reach the international market. The import-

FRAN GALA

"The more sophisticated the lyric, the easier the melody should be," Lins offered as a songwriting guideline.

'WE CAN FIGHT. WE CAN SING. WE CAN DANCE. AND WE CAN LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE AND TRY TO DO SOMETHING TO GET BETTER.'

ant and best-known Brazilian musicians were those like Jobim and Milton Nascimento."

Also on his list of Brazilian greats, Lins adds that "Sergio Mendes was very important. I know a lot of people used to complain about him, but he was extremely important for the Brazilian music, internationally. He made great albums, and he exposed a lot of different composers from Brazil. And he was always looking for the future, [looking to] technology and trying to explore with different sounds. We always had a great relationship. He was really always nice to me."

Lins explains that his extant songbook involves 700-plus titles, which doesn't account for an untold number of unfinished songs and fragments, contained on hard drives and, from earlier times, about 200 cassette tapes in a box "with a lot of ideas." But he says he's been lazy about listening to them.

"I'm a little bit of a compulsive songwriter," he admits. "I love to write songs. I will put ideas in my digital recorder. I don't want to be listening all the time, so I wait one week to sometimes two months, and come back to listen that idea. Then the idea sounds fresh for me. 'Aha. I did that?' Sometimes I get surprised, and then I start to work over the idea and write a song. Sometimes I'll write two or three songs a day.

"The inspiration comes when I'm playing. I used to play almost every day, to prepare for the next show or set list and play the songs. Sometimes, some ideas would come to me. I have a digital recorder, and I push the record button. It's faster than to write it on paper. When inspiration comes, you have to be ready."

Although Lins has written lyrics to his tunes, often the words come from other poetic sources, including a long association with Vitor Martins. In the case of one of his more popular tunes, "Começar de Novo," lyrics include both Martins' and an English lyric by American songwriting legends Alan and Marilyn Bergman, under the English title "The Island."

The songwriter is well aware of the delicate dance of melody and lyric in his work. "I love my melodies," Lins explains, "and the melody works for the words. Sometimes the poetry is sophisticated. The more sophisticated the lyric, the easier the melody should be. That's a concept. I used to do music for theater in the '70s. There, the words are really more important than the melody. The melody has to just work for the lyrics and the message."

Lins' songs can take on a life of their own and show up in auspicious times and places. This year, for instance, his 1980 song "Um Novo Tempo," addressing a U.S.-backed regime in Brazil, was played in Beijing's Tianenman Square, timed with the arrival of current Brazilian president Lula da Silva. The songwriter was moved by the song's Beijing moment.

"The lyrics are really a very hopeful message. People love to sing that song here because the last four years were really bad for us (under the right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro). But we never lose the hope. Hopeful songs started to be played here, not only 'Um Novo Tempo,' and other songwriters started to write hopeful songs, you know, dreaming with a 'new time.' It's a sort of a hopeful anthem, in a way."

Looking back over his 50-plus years in music, and specifically the songwriting art, Lins recognizes certain traits and objectives driving his artistic evolution. "I always pursued beauty and spiritual feelings, the good feelings. If you read the lyrics of my whole work, it's rare that you're gonna see something rude or negative or bad.

"I have no problem with calling out problems. But you have to say that this is gonna change. We can fight. We can sing. We can dance. And we can look toward the future and try to do something to get better. And that's the target of my music." **DB**

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"We play traditional rhythms, but the nature of the traditional rhythms is that there's improvisation and a lot of room for expression," John Santos says of his music.

JOHN SANTOS' CARIBBEAN PHILOSOPHY

BY KEN MICALLEF PHOTO BY MICHAEL G. STEWART

Working from his self-described "mansion" in Oakland, California, John Santos is surrounded by the things he loves most: his family, more than 5,000 vinyl records and hundreds of globally sourced percussion objects dating from the early 1900s to present.

One of the most prolific, awarded, and recorded Afro-Caribbean percussionists in the world, the 68-year-old Santos is also a renowned educator, clinician, author and subject of the 2023 documentary *Skin to Skin* (Searchlight Films). He has recorded more than 20 albums as a leader (many on his own Machete label), with highlights including Orquesta Batachanga's *Mañana Para Los Niños* (1985), the Grammy-nominated John Santos y El Coro Folklorico Kindembo's *La Guerra No* (2008) and The John Santos Sextet's *Art Of The Descarga* (Smithsonian Folkways, 2020).

Santos' latest release, *Filosofía Caribeña Vol. 3: A Puerto Rico Del Alma*, reflects his long career and deep family heritage, fea-

turing his core band and a host of celebrated guest musicians including Jimmy Bosch, José Roberto Hernandez, Giovanni Hidalgo, Manny Martinez, Beatriz Muñíz, Christian Nieves, Sandy Pérez, Fito Reinoso, Sandra García Rivera, Ismael Rodriguez and Elio Villafranca.

> *'WE PLAY TRADITIONAL RHYTHMS, BUT THE NATURE OF THE TRADITIONAL RHYTHMS IS THAT THERE'S IMPROVISATION AND A LOT OF ROOM FOR EXPRESSION.'*

In the liner notes, he calls it "our homage to the tiny island with the immense heart that has produced so much marvelous music, while valiantly resisting colonial violence and mentality for over 500 years.

"Puerto Rico is also the birthplace of my great grandparents, Domingo Troche Caraballo Pérez from Yauco and Juana Dominga Ramos Borrero from Peñuelas, both in the southwest of the island. My family migrated from Puerto Rico to Hawaii in 1901 and to San Francisco in 1925. My stepgrandfather, Julio Rivera — an exceptional requintero and guitarrista from San Mateo de Cangrejos whose band I began playing with at the age of 12 — came to San Francisco in the late 1930s. This is a very personal project to honor those deep roots from the island that we still feel deep in our hearts."

To those uninitiated in this rich folkloric music, *Filosofía Caribeña Vol. 3: A Puerto Rico Del Alma* is like the sound of fireworks at Puerto Rico's San Sebastián Street Festival. The heat and glare of Santos' profoundly groove-inducing sextet equally reflect the simple beauty of the traditional plena rhythm, which Santos executes to sublime stature on "No Me Mientas Más," one of five original Santos compositions on the album, accompanied by four covers.

Growing up in the Bernal Heights section of San Franscisco, Santos was engulfed in music. He attended high school with Carlos Santana and played conga (after starting on clarinet) with dozens of ethnically diverse bands.

"We were in the middle of the city, right on the edge of the barrio of the Latin district, which overlooked the Mission District," Santos explained by phone. "It was like a mini World's Fair. We had a Mexican family, a Chinese family, a Puerto Rican family, a white family, a mixed family, a Cuban family, a gay couple. I did a lot of playing coming up in Dolores Park in the Mission District, and there was a lot of music in the street at that time."

While his parents perfected their swing dancing technique, John spent evenings at his grandparents' house, spellbound by their "incredible collection of Puerto Rican music," he said. "The first band I played with was my step-grandfather's band; he played a variety of different kinds of guitars."

Santos also inhaled Cape Verdean music in the family home, performed by his other grandfather. By 1966, Santos was playing conga with his grandfather's band, learning the oral tradition from the source.

He takes pride in a huge collection of Puerto Rican rhythm and song books given to him by both of his grandfathers. "It has been the resource for me my whole life," he noted.

Eventually, Santos became a close collaborator with renown Cuban percussionist Orestes Vilató, a seminal figure who graced the bands of Ray Baretto, Fania All Stars and Santana.

"When Orestes moved out here in 1980, we began a relationship that continues to this day," he explained. "He's on just about all of my records, including *Filosofía Caribeña Vol. 3: A Puerto Rico Del Alma*. He gave me a conga drum that was given to him in his childhood. It's probably from the 1940s."

As for the literal meaning of the new album's title, Santos translates it as "Caribbean philosophy. A Puerto Rico del Alma means 'to Puerto Rico from the heart.' It's the first time I've made an entire project of all Puerto Rican music and rhythms. I've usually mixed it with more Cuban-themed material."

Which begs the question, is Santos a staunch traditionalist regarding indigenous rhythms, or does he allow room for personalization and stylization?

"We play traditional rhythms, but the nature of the traditional rhythms is that there's improvisation and a lot of room for expression," he says. "What we and a lot of people do is take those traditional rhythms and make them our own. We bend them and play with them and experiment within the parameters of the tradition, and sometimes, beyond. We create music that is right out of the tradition, but it's something new."

Also new, or at least recent, is the 2020 Santos documentary *Skin to Skin*, described on the film's website as "a feature documentary about master Latin Jazz percussionist and community activist John Santos. An urban legend, Santos is acknowledged as a 'keeper of the Afro-Caribbean flame, using music to navigate the politics of culture, global migration and his Puerto Rican heritage.'"

Santos' solo recorded output is impressive, and his sideman discography, equally so. It includes Tito Puente Orchestra's *Un Poco Loco* (Concord, 1987), Charlie Hunter Quartet's *Pound For Pound* (Blue Note, 1998), Omar Sosa's *Bembon* (Ota, 2000) and Alexa Weber Morales' *Vagabundeo/Wanderings* (Patois, 2007). These put Santos in mind of his earliest albums as a leader: John Santos & The Machete Ensemble's *Africa Vol. 1* (1988) and *Machete* with special quests Chocolate, Anthony Carrillo, Cachao and Orestes Vilató (1995); and *Machetazo: Ten Years On The Edge* (1998).

"I'm proud of my early records because we put a lot of love into them and collaborated with a lot of musicians," Santos said. "My core group is a sextet, but there are 25 or 30 musicians on each of those records which we brought in from different generations, these master musicians from Cuba and Puerto Rico. Those records really stand the test of time."

Santos is already in production on his next recording, *Vieja Escuela* (Machete), scheduled for release next January. **DB**

ALEJANDRO AZCUY

"This is not an album for dancing," Fonseca says about his new recording, *La Gran Diversión*. "But if you want to move, to dance, you're welcome."

ROBERTO FONSECA'S NOSTALGIC TRUTH

BY PHILLIP LUTZ

Ever the trouper, Roberto Fonseca was gamely persevering amid the frequent breakdowns on a late-summer Zoom call from his home in infrastructure-challenged Havana, Cuba.

On the cusp of a European tour and the release of an album, *La Gran Diversión* (3ème bureau), the pianist spoke with the urgency of a man who had looked himself in the eye and decided to face the forces that shaped him.

"I said, 'You know what? I'm 48,'" he explained. "I need to tell the truth about my life.'"

If the sounds on the album are any indication, Fonseca's truth encompasses a powerful nostalgia for a time before his time: that of the brassy big bands, like those of Benny Moré and Mario Bauzá, whose heyday was in and around the 1950s.

A brassy swagger suffuses much of the album — most seductively, perhaps, on "Maní Mambo," a hyperkinetic gem powered by wailing trumpets (Roberto García and Thommy Lowry Garcia) and primal growls (Dutch singer Clarence Bekker) atop pulsating percussion (Andrés Coayo and Inor Sotolongo).

"This is not an album for dancing," Fonseca said. "But if you want to move, to dance, you're welcome."

Equally powerful, but occupying a far more restrained sound world, is "Mercedes." A tribute to his mother, from whom it takes its title, the tune draws on the tradition of lyrical Chopin preludes. In it, Fonseca, a self-described romantic and well-schooled musician with a master's in composition from the Instituto Superior de Arte, employs a spare melody that sings as harmonies subtly shift below it.

The tune, he said, recalls a turning point in his life when his mother convinced a schoolmaster to allow a wayward Roberto, then a teenager tempted by extra-musical distractions, to continue his studies. The tune lingers lovingly on the melody before swelling to a finale in which his mother's voice, which introduced the piece, takes it out — bringing a kind of emotional closure to Fonseca in the process.

"I spent three days playing the last part in a loop," he recalled. "I was so tortured, I was so emotional, I was so excited to find it. Almost every time I play that song, tears come out from my eyes."

His thoughts drifted back to his days growing up in San Miguel del Padrón, a district of strivers on the southeastern outskirts of Havana: "My family was not a rich family. We had some struggles. But my parents never showed me this kind of thing. And when you grow up and you realize what your parents did for you, the minimum you can do is a song for them."

quarters, cemented a reputation that he regards as unduly limiting.

"I don't want to be Buena Vista Social Club, Part 2," he said. "I don't want to be a copy of anyone."

That seems unlikely, according to Marysol Quevedo, a professor at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music and an expert on the Cuban music scene.

'I DON'T WANT TO BE BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB, PART 2.'

For all the emotion inspiring Fonseca, his intellect also drives his creativity. "Sal Al Malecón," one of the few pieces without a vocal element, presents an innovative rhythmic strategy, combining the 6/8 meter common to Afro-Cuban religious ritual with the 4/4 meter common to traditional Cuban music. Guided by Fonseca's preternatural sense of time, the synthesis is executed to disarming effect.

"This isn't just playing for playing's sake," he said. "I'm doing research. I want to create something new."

Fonseca may not be playing for playing's sake, but his pianism remains impressive. "Oscar Please Stop," a flag-waver of dazzling dexterity and sublime musicality in the Oscar Peterson tradition, evokes Peterson's spirit filtered through Cuban style. Performing it reminds Fonseca of the first time he heard the legendarily pianist.

"I was in shock," he recalled. "I said to my mom, 'I'm going to quit playing piano because I never will play like Oscar Peterson.' She said, 'Don't worry. You will study and get there.'"

In violinist Regina Carter's opinion, he may be on the way. "He's killer on piano," said Carter, who, on *La Gran Diversión*, brings her Charanga chops to bear in sharp-edged counterpoint to Fonseca's cutting attack on "Kinka Mache." "He's very soulful, really knows the instrument. He's a beautiful player."

Carter first played with Fonseca in 2016, when he was the musical director for singer Omara Portuondo of Buena Vista Social Club. An association with that celebrated group, in which Fonseca made a splash in his mid-20s by replacing its ailing longtime pianist Rubén González, both raised his profile and, in some

Despite hardships, she said, the artistic environment in Havana is vibrant, and Fonseca is among its most forward-looking players, even as he respects tradition.

"It's not like the Buena Vista Social Club myth, frozen in time," she said, noting that he plays to packed houses by feeding a hunger for an "integrated" sound that fuses Afro-Cuban with jazz and popular elements.

And, she added, he thrives while confronting societal problems. Dicey internet connections, for example, demand that information be exchanged on flash drives. More daunting, perhaps, are culture crackdowns, like the notorious Decree 349 of 2018, which calls for greater government control over artists. While Quevedo said that enforcement of the decree is difficult and may be "on pause," it looms as a reminder of the threats to creative freedom.

Navigating these waters "takes a special kind of personality," she said, adding that only an artist with a "healthy and nuanced relationship to the state and the cultural institutions inside it" will be granted permission to tour outside Cuba, as Fonseca will when he plays France, Norway and Sweden in the fall.

Meanwhile, Fonseca the trouper marches on, finding expression — and maybe a bit of refuge — in the music.

"Now, in Cuba, we are having a special time," he said, invoking what Quevedo called the "wink-wink-nudge-nudge" euphemism for times that are harder than the government lets on.

"They are trying to change some stuff. To be honest, really honest, I'm just trying to be out of anything and everything that gives me some sort of bad or sad feeling." **DB**

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LATIN JAZZ

CALIENTE!

NEW HOT LATIN RELEASES THAT SIZZLE THIS FALL!

BY CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON

This crop of great sounds shares the soundtrack of a vibrant Latinidad that is deeply rooted in vibrant histories, geographies and legacies. Enjoy!

SOFIA REI AND JORGE ROEDER

Coplas Escondidas (Hidden Tales)

(Cascabelera)

On her third album, New-York based Argentine vocalist, composer and producer Sofia Rei continues her shapeshifting exploration of melodies and rhythms from Latin America. Here, she joins forces with Peruvian-born bassist and composer Jorge Roeder, also based in New York City, who moves within the realms of jazz, folk and classical music with aplomb. Together for the first time, they create musical magic. *Coplas Escondidas* shares 11 beautifully austere ballads sung in three languages — Spanish, Portuguese and English — by renowned composers from Chabuca Granda to Thelonius Monk. The result is music of breathtaking beauty and emotional depth that showcase Rei's luminous voice, masterfully enveloped in a tapestry of Roeder's evocative bass lines.

JONATHAN SUAZO

Ricano

(Ropeadope)

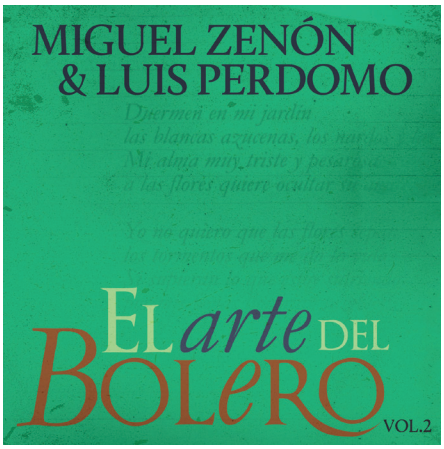
On *Ricano*, saxophonist and composer Jonathan Suazo illuminates his Puerto Rican/Dominican roots and features other musicians who have inspired his work, such as Puerto Rico's Miguel Zenón and David Sánchez. This debut album (whose title combines the words Puertorriqueño and Dominicano) centers the artists' two heritages in a unique fusion. The tracks range from "Heroes," focusing the percussion, vocals and chants of the powerful salve of the D.R.'s Enerolisa Nuñez, a member of the Mata los Indios community who has kept the centuries-old tradition alive, to "Somos más que tú," inspired by Puerto Rico's plena genre (a mainstay of protest music) to the final track, "Amapola," a tune by Dominican pop-roots icon Juan Luis Guerra that Suazo envelops in a soundscape propelled by lyrical sax playing.

LATIN-JAZZ SINFONICA & GERMAN POPS ORCHESTRA

Kaleidoskop

(Neuklang)

Recorded last year at Bauer Studios in Ludwigsburg, *Kaleidoskop* brings together 18 jazz and Latin musicians and 39 orchestra musicians with jazz greats such as Kristjan Randalu on piano, Wim de Vries on drums and Uli Röser on trombone, as well as the musicians of the German Pops Orchestra led by concertmaster Uli Zimmer. The 12 lovely tracks reveal a kaleidoscope of musical colors and shapes, fueled by compositions expressing Latin-Jazz Sinfonica founder Julia H. M. Diederich's passion for Latin music, jazz and symphonic arrangements. Throughout the recording, both the orchestral and the jazz elements maintain equal protagonism within interlocking rhythms and expansive, cinematic compositions punctuated by masterful solos.



SAMMY FIGUEROA
Searching For A Memory (Busco tu Recuerdo)
(Ashe)

On his first album in nearly 10 years, via 11 gorgeous boleros, Puerto Rican percussionist Sammy Figueroa embraces the music of famed 1950s Puerto Rican singer Charlie Figueroa, the father he never knew. The stellar lineup includes pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba (who also co-produced the concept album), marvelous Cuban chanteuse Aymee Nuviola, bassist Ricky Rodriguez, drummer Ludwig Afonso and Cuban saxophone player Felipe LaMoglia, as well as several guests, including saxophonist Miguel Zenón, trumpeter John Daversa, Munir Hossn on guitar and percussion and Magela Herrera on flute. A poignant father-and-son reunion takes place during the title track (Charlie Figueroa's greatest hit) as Figueroa sings on a recording for the first time and ends the song with a poignant whisper, "Charlie Figueroa, te quiero."

HAROLD LÓPEZ-NUSSA
Timba a la Americana
(Blue Note)

Timba a la Americana is Cuban pianist and composer Harold López-Nussa's Blue Note debut and 10th album. Produced by Snarky Puppy bandleader Michael League, López-Nussa shares 10 spirited tunes, ranging from the fiery to the lyrical, ably accompanied by Grégoire Maret on harmonica, Luques Curtis on bass, Bárbaro "Machito" Crespo on congas and Ruy Adrián López-Nussa on drums. Inspired by his move to Paris from Cuba, the 10 tracks mix in elements of his homeland's iconic genres such as danzón, mambo, timba and rumba as well as traditional bata drums and synths in complex, heady mezclas.

Timba a la Americana is a musical love-letter to the cornerstones of Cuban grooves, now filtered through new insights afforded by distance and perspective, and propelled by López-Nussa's polished, superb playing.

HILARIO DURÁN
Cry Me A River
(Alma)

On *Cry Me A River*, Cuban-Canadian maestro Hilario Durán's first big band recording in nearly two decades, the Grammy-nominated and Juno Award-winning pianist, composer and band director leads a 19-piece ensemble with magnificent results. The nine tunes draw sustenance from Durán's traditions, yet along the way also pay homage to maestros from both the classical and jazz realms. Invited guests include acclaimed Cuban alto saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera, drummer and percussionist Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez and Okan's Elizabeth Rodriguez on violins. *Cry Me A River* is remarkable for inventive arrangements that intertwine traditional grooves with fabulously lush, richly textured orchestration and uninhibited improvisation.

MIGUEL ZENÓN
El Arte del Bolero, Vol. 2
(Miel)

The union of the intense bolero and jazz is a marriage made in heaven, in which the possibilities of expressing passion, longing and other delicious romantic torments find perfect expression. For his second album dedicated to the iconic Latin American art form, Zenón, a Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellow, pairs up with another virtuoso and frequent longtime collaborator, Venezuelan Luis Perdomo, a New York-based, Grammy-nominated pianist, composer, arranger and educator. Together, they explore six exquisite, seminal songs, including Venezuelan icon Simon Diaz's "Caballo Viejo" and Mexican songwriter Emma Elena Valdelamar's "Mucho Corazón." In an extraordinary follow-up to *El Arte del Boro, Vol. 1*, these timeless tunes are slowed down, blended with unusual elements, played out of time, deconstructed and reconstructed as Zenón and Perdomo extract nuances from the originals that we hardly imagined could exist.

SANTIAGO BIG BAND FEATURING MARCOS FERNANDEZ/AFRO LATIN JAZZ ORCHESTRA FEATURING ARTURO O'FARRILL
Santiago–Brooklyn–Santiago
(Zoho)

A pandemic-times collaboration between two jazz greats who both play the piano — Santiago, Cuba's Marcos Fernandez and Brooklyn, New York's Arturo O'Farrill — *Santiago–Brooklyn–Santiago* is fabulously alive, despite the fact that the several dozen members of each maestro's ensemble — Santiago Big Band and Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, respectively — actually completed all the recordings separately, back in 2022.

Featuring a stellar series of invited musical guests, the Santiago Big Band recorded at Siboney Studios in Santiago de Cuba's Studios 18 Egrem, and PM Records in Havana, while the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra recorded remotely at the homes of orchestra members.

The vital pulse of the city of Santiago and its rumba, guaganco, comparsa, son, cha-cha and mambo grooves all intertwine in this extraordinary artistic exchange.

It's a testament to the power of art to overcome any divisions that political entities might impose. **DB**

THE CHEMISTRY OF IRREVERSIBLE ENTANGLEMENTS

BY JOHN MURPH PHOTOS BY BOB SWEENEY

Eight years ago, the now-shuttered Brooklyn-based underground performance space The Silent Barn hosted a Musicians Against Police Brutality event in the aftermath of the murder of Akai Gurley, an unarmed 28-year-old Black man who was shot by Peter Liang, a New York City Police officer, in November 2014.

Among the musicians at Silent Barn that evening were a trio consisting of bassist Luke Stewart, saxophonist Keir Neuringer and poet and sound sculptor Camae Ayewa (who also performs as Moor Mother). Also on the bill was Heritage of the Invisible, a duo act composed of trumpeter Aquiles Navarro and drummer Tcheser Holmes.

Somehow amid the phalanx of musicians, a mutual admiration sparked between the two acts. "That night there

were a lot of musicians, which was very beautiful," Navarro recalls. "But, honestly, I don't remember seeing Camae, Luke and Keir on stage."

Navarro, however, does remember the sound of Neuringer's piercing, emotive alto saxophone. "I'm a big sound person in terms of determining if the sound really resonates with me. The body doesn't lie. So Keir's saxophone sound caught my attention."

Navarro and Holmes had just moved to the Big Apple from Boston, where they studied at New England Conservatory of Music. Prior to the Silent Barn event, the duo held a residency at the Bowery Poetry Club, where Navarro and Holmes would play about six minutes of jazz improvisation then accompany a rotating cast of spoken word artists. Still they kept their ears open for new opportunities in terms of performance spaces and other poets.

After Neuringer's performance with Stewart and Ayewa that night, he approached Navarro and Holmes to see if they were interested in joining forces. "The combination between us with trumpet and drums, and them with the voice, saxophone and bass, was perfect," Navarro says. "Plus, the thing that brought us together is the very essence of an irreversible entanglement. It's like that thing that you didn't know was already supposed to be together through the sound. It was meant to be."

"Everything came together like the universe intended," Stewart adds.

That spark between the two acts soon ignited into flame, giving birth to Irreversible Entanglements, a 21st century free-jazz quintet that has gained international acclaim from the noteworthy tastemaker media outlets such as Pitchfork, Wire magazine, and National Public Radio because of the group's searing performances and three combustive albums — *Irreversible Entanglements* (2017), *Who Sent You?* (2020) and *Open The Gates* (2021) — on the Chicago-based indie label International Anthem.

The flame underneath the group rises even higher and hotter this year with *Protect Your Light*, their iridescent new album and first major release on Impulse! Records. Given the storied history of Impulse!, which has documented some of jazz's most fearless, sonically unyielding artists, such as Archie Shepp, Pharoah Sanders, Roswell Rudd, Sun Ra and, of course, John and Alice Coltrane, respectively, the signing of Irreversible Entanglements is all the more auspicious yet probable.

The quintet recorded the new album in January 2023, some at the Brooklyn-based studio Figure 8 Recording. But what really raises the stakes, in terms of jazz historical reverence, is the fact that the group also ventured to Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, to record portions at the Van Gelder Studio — the same studio where John Coltrane recorded *A Love Supreme*, Shepp recorded *Fire Music* and Sanders made *Tauhid*. And that's just a tiny slice of the seminal art recorded there.

"It was definitely the first time I took pictures as we were recording," Holmes recalls of his experience at the Van Gelder Studio. "I wanted to document it because it felt like I was dreaming to some extent. I kept thinking, 'My God, look what we are doing.' You adore many of those Impulse! records with that orange and black spine.

"But it felt like work, too," Holmes continues. "It never occurred to me until I went into that drum room and I was like, 'Oh, Elvin Jones was actually working when he recorded *A Love Supreme*. Yes, there was so much spirituality involved. But it struck

me thinking that these guys were working really hard creating John Coltrane's album. And then I thought, 'My God, I'm with this band, Irreversible Entanglements. And we are working.'"

"Some studios are harder to get into," Ayewa adds. "With some studios, you need a connector. It's really hard. So, we definitely cherish the moment to be able to record in such a high-quality space with high-quality individuals behind the boards. It was a great experience."

Consisting of all new material, *Protect Your Light* kicks off with the album's lead single, "Free Love," on which Ayewa's spectral voice bursts through a brief, ominous sound cloud by intoning "free love that lives in you" before giving way to a mediation on affirming love that coalesces erotic and artistic pleasures. Once Stewart's undulating ostinato figure and Holmes' serrated drums propel the declarative riff of the horns, Ayewa's layering poetry lulls the listener into a sensual world that sounds like the unlocking of Chakra energy.

"Everything came together like the universe intended," says Luke Stewart of the members of Irreversible Entanglements, from left, Camae Ayewa, Aquiles Navarro, Tcheser Holmes, Keir Neuringer and Stewart.

The album proceeds with the title track, a joyous call-to-action assertion that bounces to a Brazilian samba groove on which the succinct melody played by Navarro and Neuringer prances with gleeful aplomb before the quintet enters into a free-

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fall of squalling dissonance and thunderous rhythms that have become the sonic trademark of the band.

Janice Lowe's sparse yet haunting piano adds new dimension to the album on "Our Land Back," a brooding condemnation of the act of historical and cultural displacement and erasure inflicted on various people around the world where land has been stolen. As pianist and vocalist, Lowe also appears on the soul-stirring, slow-burning "Sunshine."

Cellist Lester St. Louis is another special guest, who helps animate "root ⇔ branch," a poignant tone poem dedicated to the late trumpeter and composer Jaimie Branch, and the torrential-turned-tranquil "Degrees Of Freedom."

Compared to Irreversible Entanglements' previous albums on International Anthem, which deftly captured the howling rage of the Black Lives Matter movement, *Protect Your Light* emits a sunnier vibe — sonically and thematically — at times without ignoring the darker sociopolitical truths that lurk in the shadows then negatively impact oppressed communities.

"If you put us into a recording studio every day of the week, we would make a different album each day," Neuringer says of Irreversible Entanglements' bottomless fountain of creative resources. "There's a lot of fire and creativity when we get together. With Impulse! Records, we reached a point where we could consider bigger moves."

"I think with the material for *Protect Your Light*, the band is more focused on 'song' songs," observes Brandon Stosuy, Irreversible Entanglements' manager. "Having more time to work together, especially with the new album, they crafted more specific songs instead of going into the studios and leaning so much into long, free-improvisation jams. But their energy level is still the same being on Impulse!"

Neuringer cited Stosuy as being instrumental in getting Irreversible Entanglements signed on Impulse! The manager notes, however, that the quintet still maintains a healthy relationship with its former record label.

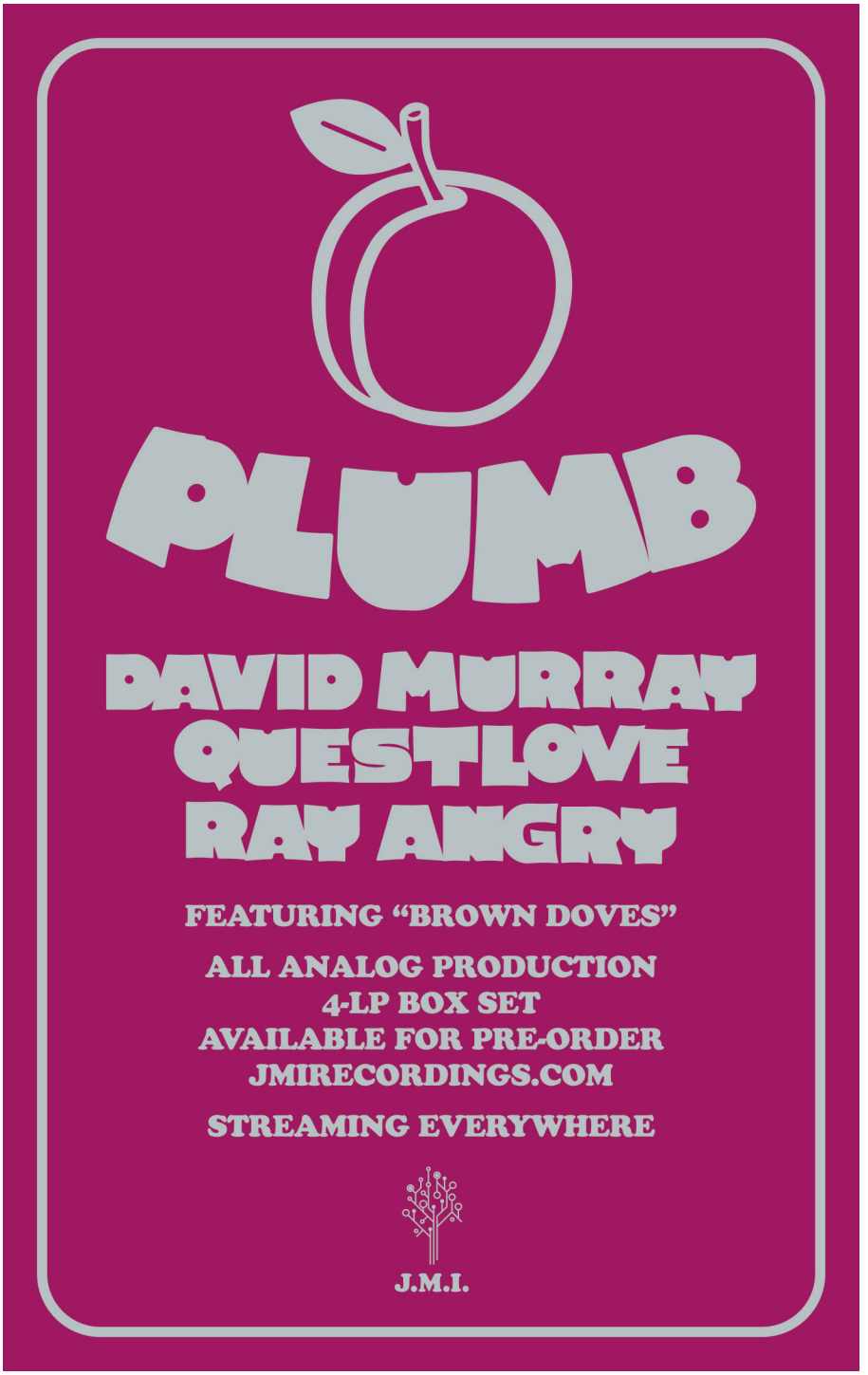
"International Anthem has been great. When the band is on tour, we're in conversation with the label to make those great albums like *Open The Gates* and *Who Sent You?* are there. So, there are no hard feelings. The band just wanted to see what happens when you push something with more resources and support.

"Also, the band members are huge jazz historians. Just being on Impulse! is such an amazing thing to each of them. I remember Luke picking up the vinyl copy of *Protect Your Light*, looking at the orange-and-black spine then saying, 'My God!' Luke also mentioned that when we went into the Van Gelder Studio, he actually teared up. I think it was also exciting for the band to bring back some of the earlier vibes of Impulse! when things sounded more complex and noisier."

Holmes says that *Protect Your Light* also reflects growth as both a collective and as individual members.

"We're all older now. Our times with International Anthem were the greatest; and we still have a great relationship with that label. But we definitely understand the weight of the opportunity of recording on Impulse! and we wanted to make a statement."

The drummer recalls the band members gathering in California and having deep conversations about what each wanted to do with the new opportunity. "It was kind of like a recording powwow," Holmes says. "We were in California and hadn't seen each other in a while. And as we talked about what we want-



ed to do with this album, we were in front of each other, so the energy magnified. It feels differently when you talk about something face-to-face."

In addition to remaining intact for eight years, another interesting component of Irreversible Entanglements is that there has never been a centralized location where all the band members resided. From the start, the band members, individually, lived in New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Now, some of the members live in Rochester, New York, Brooklyn and Los Angeles — Ayewa now teaching composition at University of Southern California Thornton School of Music.

Each member juggles multiple projects as solo artists, side people and collaboratives in other ensembles. When asked what prevents Irreversible Entanglements from disbanding because of competing individual interests, mutual admiration for each other is frequently cited.

'IN THIS BAND, WE PUSH EACH OTHER SO MUCH, MUSICALLY. AND THAT INSPIRES ME TO PUSH MYSELF FORWARD IN OTHER PROJECTS.' —LUKE STEWART

"Being in this band is an amazing and unique experience compared to what I had in the past," Stewart says. "The level of camaraderie and trust is what I learn from this band — how to be more open and to trust.

"In this band, we push each other so much, musically. And that inspires me to push myself forward in other projects. Being in this band teaches me how to be a better collaborator with others and to be a better musician, and to how to better formulate ideas — making my own ideas clearer. This band is an example for a lot of things for my own personal development."

"When we get together, we maintain the excitement of that first meeting at Silent Barn," Neuringer adds. "We're able to maintain that excitement through our constant personal development that we bring to the band on every tour, performance or recording session."

"The chemistry that keeps the band together is the fascination that we have with each other," Neuringer concludes. "The people in the band play with me like they love me. And I play with each person in the band like I love them. The playing together is a love chemistry. It's a real expression of how we love each other's artistry, creativity and individually as people." **DB**

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Chief Adjuah
Bark Out Thunder Roar Out Lightning
ROPEADOPE

★★★★

Neglected culture withers; well-tended culture flourishes. On his 14th studio album, trumpeter Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah (formerly Christian Scott) shelves his forward-thinking nu-jazz and immerses himself in the rich experience of NOLA's Black Masking Indians, a family tradition that this 40-year-old Ninth Ward native amplifies with dazzling performances built on percussion and chanting. Which means: horn out, drums in. It's a bold move, poetically reminding us that a message of resistance has long been part of Mardi Gras "party" theatrics.

In place of his usual instrument, Adjuah plays a self-invented 20-string electric bow that harks to the koras and n'gonis of West Africa but packs more punch. Indeed, *Bark Out Thunder Roar Out Lightning* lives up to its title. Rhythm is paramount; Adjuah's lyrical ax supplements a battery of percussionists responsible for the program's fierce grooves. From "Shallow Water's" metallic percolation, to "On To New Orleans (Runnin' In 7's Redux)'s" vocal-less rampage, to "Trouble That Mornin's" ominous stealth, the entire work brims with roiling energy that boosts the impact of its pointed lyrics.

Those lyrics hit an emotional zenith with the title cut, a 15-minute manifesto that scalds with equal parts pride and contempt. Adjuah calibrates pulse and tempo to suit the tale of a man who rallies the tribes and "builds a world anew." Recorded in a country where your skin color can get you killed, it's courageous storytelling that confronts oppression with the promise of a rectified future. Say hello to a well-tended culture of resistance. —*Jim Macnie*

Bark Out Thunder Roar Out Lightning: Blood Calls Blood; Trouble That Mornin'; Xodokan Iko–Hu Na Ney; Bark Out Thunder Roar Out Lightning; Shallow Water (Tribute Big Chief Donald Harrison Sr.–Guardians Of The Flame); Guardians Of The Flame; On To New Orleans (Runnin' In 7's Redux); End Simulation; Ashé Chief Donald (Tribute Big Chief Donald Harrison Jr.–Congo Square Nation); Golden Crown (Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah–Xodokan Nation); Bark Out Thunder Roar Out Lightning (Duo). (65:15)

Personnel: Adjuah, vocals, Chief Adjuah's Bow, Chief Adjuah's N'Goni, SPDSX, pan-African kit, bells, tambourine, percussion, synth percussion, sonic architecture; Weedie Braimah, djembe, congas, tambourine, percussion, vocals; Luques Curtis, bass, guembri, vocals (2, 3, 5, 8, 9); Joe Dyson Jr., pan-African drum kit (6); Lioness Sia Fodey, vocals (3, 5, 9); Corey Fonville (6), Marcus Gilmore (3, 5), drums; Elé Howell, pan-African drum kit, drums, bells, tambourine, vocals (3, 5, 8–10); Alfred Jordan, drums, percussion, tambourine, vocals (3, 5, 8, 9); Amyna Love, vocals (3, 5, 9); Brian Richburg Jr., drums, SPDSX, percussion, tambourine, vocals (3, 5, 7, 9); Amina Scott, vocals (3, 5, 9); Trail Chief Kiel Adrian Scott, percussion, vocals (3, 5, 8, 9); Mizan Willis, dun dun, shekere, bells, percussion (3, 5, 9).

Ordering info: christianscott.bandcamp.com

Steve Lehman
Ex Machina
PI

★★★★★

Given all the fuss about artificial intelligence assembling pop singles and replacing musicians, the last place anyone would imagine finding a positive example of musical AI would be on a jazz album. Yet Steve Lehman, working with fellow composer Frédéric Maurin, has managed exactly that with *Ex Machina*, a big band album featuring improvisation by both humans and software.

Don't misunderstand: Lehman and company haven't replaced Our New Robot Overlords with Our New Robot Sidemen. He and Maurin use a generative software called Dicy2, which functions as a sort of improvisational second voice, reacting to the sound of a human improvisor. Because Dicy2 reacts across a range of parameters from timbre to pitch to rhythm, it can add anything from otherworldly smears of abstract sound, as during Lehman's alto solo on "Ode To Aklaff," to a virtual duet partner, as with Chris Dingman's vibraphone intro to "Chimera."

This dovetails nicely with Lehman and Maurin's interest in spectral music. Sometimes that interest plays out as dense clouds of harmony, as with the woodwinds and brass layered against the droning synths of "39," and sometimes as glitchy, spasming rhythmic patterns, as on "Los Angeles Imaginary." Either way, the results are astonishing, richly detailed, brilliantly colored and full of improvisational fire.

—J.D. Considine

Ex Machina: 39; Los Angeles Imaginary; Chimera; Alchimie; Ode To Aklaff; Jeux D'Anches; Les Treize Soleils; Speed Freeze (Part 1); Speed Freeze (Part 2); Le Seuil (Part 1): Le Seuil (Part 2). (71:01)
Personnel: Steve Lehman, alto saxophone, electronics; Jérôme Nike, generative electronics creations and artistic collaboration; Fanny Ménégoz, flute, alto flute, piccolo; Catherine Delaunay, clarinet, basset horn; Julien Soro, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Fabien Debellefontaine, baritone saxophone, clarinet, flute; Fabien Norbert, trumpet, flugelhorn; Jonathan Finlayson, trumpet; Daniel Zimmermann, Christiane Bopp, trombone; Fanny Meteier, tuba; Bruno Ruder, piano, synthesizer; Chris Dingman, vibraphone; Stéphane Caracci, vibraphone, marimba, glockenspiel, percussion, synthesizer; Sarah Murcia, bass; Rafaël Koerner, drums; Dionysios Papanikolaou, IRCAM electronics; Frédéric Maurin, electronics, conductor.

Ordering info: pirecordings.com

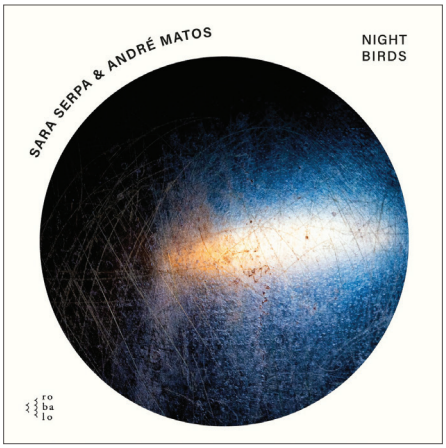
Sara Serpa/André Matos
Night Birds
ROBALO

★★★½

The title cut of *Night Birds* (Robalo), the third duo album by vocalist Sara Serpa and guitarist André Matos, borrows its sounds from the evening darkness: rustling leaves, hooting calls, whispers. Both Serpa and Matos excel at parsing lower amplitudes, so you expect the quiet. What comes as a surprise is the tune's animation: The nighttime world is anything but asleep.

Serpa lends her clarion, straight-toned vocalese to the album's 11 tracks, 10 of them improvisatory originals. Her dexterous shifts in register enhance the musical tension (as on "From A Distance" and "Bergman's Island") and her clean vocals accentuate the motivic passages ("Carlos" and Bartok's "Bagatelle, Op. 6, Lento").

In keeping with Serpa's assertive melodicism, Matos' playing is spare but pointed, bolstering the emotional intensity of harmonically stratified pieces like "Degrowth" and "Counting" (both featuring guest singer Sofia Jernberg) and "Watching You Grow." The latter features a charming spoken word section by the couple's son Lourenço; he also appears on "Family," a layered vocal track that pulses and bends around a rhythmic head (with drummer João Pereira).

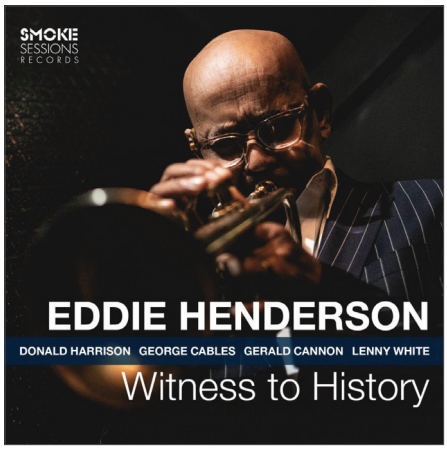


Each tune advances the album's message, clearest on "Lost Whale," with its creaking intro, weird humming and scratchy bowing (by cellist Okkyung Lee and keyboardist Dov Manski). With these unsettling sounds, the duo voices the question: What do we leave for our children if we shut our eyes to the destruction of our planet?

—Suzanne Lorge

Night Birds: From A Distance; Carlos; Melting Ice; Family; Night Birds; Counting; Underwater; Degrowth; Bergman's Island; Lost Whale; Watching You Grow; Bagatelle, Op. 6, Lento. (43:52)
Personnel: Sara Serpa, voice; André Matos, guitars, bass, percussion; Dov Manski, piano, synthesizer; João Pereira, drums (2–7, 10); Sofia Jernberg, voice (5, 7, 9); Okkyung Lee, cello (8, 10); Lourenço, voice (4, 11).

Ordering info: saraserpaandrematos.bandcamp.com



Eddie Henderson
Witness To History
SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★★

Fifty years ago, trumpeter Eddie Henderson and drummer Lenny White collaborated on Henderson's first album as a leader, *Realization*. The idea of a reunion voyage through five decades of jazz styles — fusion, swing, modal, boogaloo and ballad — with pianist George Cables and saxophonist Donald Harrison, who mine similar territory with Henderson in The Cookers, feels altogether natural. Henderson's muscular chops and round sound are astonishing for an 83-year-old and lovely to behold.

The journey begins with "Scorpio Rising," a more deliberate and less abstract repurposing of *Realization*'s opener, "Scorpio Libra." We're in *Bitches Brew* territory here, with sultry bass (by Gerald Cannon), cushiony Fender Rhodes, searching, end-reverbed trumpet stabs and, per the original, a thwacking backbeat with two drummers. Glorious groove.

Other tracks also mix jazz, rock and funk. Eddie Harris' call-and-no-answer classic "Freedom Jazz Dance" comes crisply rocked up, and Lee Morgan's jukebox boogaloo "Totem Pole" slips into a swing-time bridge. Cables shines on that one, as well as his own slinky and modal "Why Not," which offers the lacquered sheen of a sax-and-trumpet line.

Standards get some love. Henderson's harmon mute smooches heartache into "It Never Entered My Mind" and "Sweet And Lovely" grooves as a medium-up waltz, with Harrison grabbing the bridge. The album closes with the Mel Tormé torcher "Born To Be Blue," another occasion for a tart Henderson solo and a bluesy Harrison outing.

Like its musicians, *Witness To History* will surely stand the test of time. *—Paul de Barros*

Witness To History: Scorpio Rising; Why Not; Sweet And Lovely; It Never Entered My Mind; Freedom Jazz Dance; I Am Going To Miss You, My Darling; Totem Pole; Born To Be Blue. (56:00)
Personnel: Eddie Henderson, trumpet; Donald Harrison, alto saxophone; George Cables, piano, Fender Rhodes; Gerald Cannon, bass; Lenny White, Mike Clark (1), drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com

The Hot Box

Critics	Jim Macnie	J.D. Considine	Suzanne Lorge	Paul de Barros
Chief Adjuah *Bark Out Thunder Roll Out Lightning*	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★
Steve Lehman *Ex Machina*	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★½	★★★½
Sara Serpa/André Matos *Night Birds*	★★★★	★★★½	★★★½	★★★
Eddie Henderson *Witness To History*	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Chief Adjuah, *Bark Out Thunder Roll Out Lightning*

Inspiring as it is to hear Adjuah draw connections between historical griot traditions and the practices of Mardi Gras Indians, it's hard not to wish his griot pieces were as much fun as the NOLA fare. *—J.D. Considine*

Chief Adjuah gives words to the revolutionary vision that has always fueled his music. As he expands as a lyricist — and a singer — his artistry only deepens. Even as he draws on the griots of yore, he speaks to the modern world. *—Suzanne Lorge*

Linking the everyday with the eternal by way of a mask is a time-honored jazz undertaking, and Chief Adjuah has mastered that endeavor. But his heartfelt, titular 15½-minute epic doesn't hold half the water of the briefer pieces. *—Paul de Barros*

Steve Lehman, *Ex Machina*

Lehman's composing happily takes him to points unknown, 'cept when he gets there, his ingenuity brokers a familiarity with the place. I follow along because the ride is a gas. *—Jim Macnie*

Music technology and futuristic imaginings find common ground in Lehman's compositions. As scientific advancement catches up to jazz thinking, however, such works begin to sound more prescient than fantastical. *—Suzanne Lorge*

Cool head music by witty, angular jazz guys in a large ensemble, mixing and matching wits with computers. Evan Parker had a go at this years ago, but on this project, the interactive energy between humans and machines can sometimes be readily discerned. *—Paul de Barros*

Sara Serpa/André Matos, *Night Birds*

From the abstract atmospherics to the Bartók bagatelle, the program effects a fetching vibe that woos you at each turn. Its electroacoustic temperament gleams. *—Jim Macnie*

There's a liveliness to the sound here that makes these pieces seem less like songs than worlds in miniature. Serpa's voice ensures that the material is arrestingly vivid, but it's the instrumental flora and fauna that truly bring the music to life. *—J.D. Considine*

More songlike than other works, Serpa's mostly wordless vocals cut through Matos' imaginative guitar music like shafts of light. Especially attractive: harmony on "Family," the haunting suspense of "Night Birds" and the (Meredith) Monkish "Counting." *—Paul de Barros*

Eddie Henderson, *Witness To History*

This glance in the rear-view mirror is an apt accounting of the trumpeter's fertile career. If you're looking for a through-line, the electrofunk of "Scorpio Rising," bounce of "Gingerbread Boy" and grace of "It Never Entered My Mind" remind that Miles was always his man. *—Jim Macnie*

As ever, Henderson smokes on the groovers, straightahead ("Totem Pole") or funky ("Freedom Jazz Dance"). But the killer here is "It Never Entered My Mind," an unexpectedly perfect ballad. *—J.D. Considine*

Time offers many gifts: healing, wisdom, peace. You'll find all of these here, in Henderson's effortless radiance and the ensemble's finely calibrated response. Flawless. *—Suzanne Lorge*

COMETA
LUCIANA SOUZA
&
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Grammy award winning vocalist and composer **Luciana Souza** has been a fan of the outstanding, Grammy award winning, São Paulo based piano group, **Trio Corrente**, since their inception. She had initially met the Trio's drummer, Edu Ribeiro, while teaching but was reintroduced while they recorded an album with German trumpeter, Till Brönner. Pianist Fabio Torres was also on the Brönner recording and was well known as a member of guitarist Chico Pinheiro's different ensembles, while bassist Paulo Paulelli was familiar for his work with the great Rosa Passos.

Produced by
LARRY KLEIN

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lucianasouza.com
triocorrente.com
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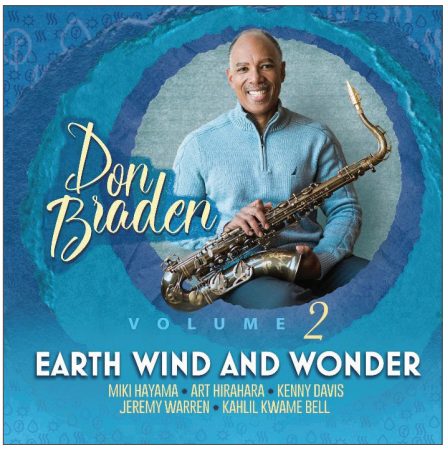


Don Braden
Earth Wind And Wonder Volume 2
INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★★

This second volume of Don Braden's *Earth Wind And Wonder* extends and bolsters the first round from five years ago. Braden has once again summoned pianist Art Hirahara, who is particularly brilliant and in sync with Braden's solos. Returning, too, are bassist Kenny Davis and drummer Jeremy Warren. Percussionist Khalil Kwame Bell and Miki Hayama on piano and keyboards chime in on several of the tunes from Stevie Wonder and EWF's fertile repertoire. "Send One Your Love" and "Reasons" are fecund with jazz intimations, the former of which the group spins far slower, and Braden's tenor saxophone dips delightfully and introspectively into this lovely ballad. You can almost hear the commanding lyrics.

"Bird Of Beauty" is both the title of the track as well as an apt description of Braden's interpretation, which exudes a feathery facility on flute. Whether on tenor, soprano or alto flute, Braden's articulation is nicely rounded, and he shifts easily and effectively in the tonal clusters and cadences. He evokes a filigree of jazz passages on "Master Blaster," with Hayama's comps and romps approximating the sound and surge of Wonder's version.

On "Arise," one of the two originals on the album, the ensemble erupts in powerful cohesion and Braden burns. While it's helpful to have a trove of tunes at your disposal, Braden shows that his own reservoir is just as potent and pleasing. Hey, gang, you've only explored a sample of the potential that awaits, if a third session is in the cards. *—Herb Boyd*

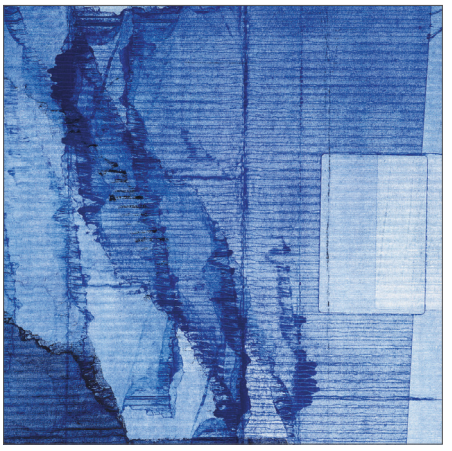
Earth Wind And Wonder Vol. 2: In the Stone; Master Blaster (Jammin'); Reasons; Profusion; Send One Your Love; Bird of Beauty; Arise; Creepin'; That's the Way of the World. (42:58)
Personnel: Don Braden, tenor saxophone, flute, and alto flute; Kenny Davis, bass; Jeremy Warren, drums; Miki Hayama, piano and keyboards (2,4,6,8); Art Hirahara, piano (1,4,5,9); Kahlil Kwame Bell, percussion (1,3,8).
Ordering info: donbraden.com

BlankFor.ms/Jason Moran/Marcus Gilmore
Refract
RED HOOK

★★★

BlankFor.ms (aka Tyler Gilmore) was a student of pianist Jason Moran at New England Conservatory before going on to arrange a few pieces for the latter's *Looks Of A Lot* project. As he developed as a composer and arranger trying to translate the elusive qualities of electronic music, he decided to go back to the source in his production work. Red Hook Records owner Sun Chung proposed this collaboration, bringing BlankFor.ms back together with his former teacher as well as drummer Marcus Gilmore for a studio session in which the latter two musicians improvised over his skeletal sonic frameworks, and the producer further processed their contributions in real time.

BlankFor.ms' main tool is degraded tape loops, where short snippets of sound — warped, smeared, wrinkled and physically disintegrating — provide atmospheric tones and terse melodic shards. On the meditative "Affectionate Painful" Moran approaches a scuffed ambient soundscape as a blank canvas for rumination, taking a few sparse chords from a flowering bud into a kaleidoscopic blossom splintered and refracted by the producer's signal processing. It becomes increasingly hard to tell who's doing what. "Inward Curve" is more developed, Moran and Gilmore engaging in a fruitful dialogue informed by the producer's contemplative soundscape. Most of the heavy lifting is done by Moran, who accomplishes a ton with minimalist ambient prompts. It's a pleasant collection of sounds, but this listener wishes BlankFor.ms had packed his tracks with more punch and depth. *—Peter Margasak*



Refract: Onset I; Onset II; Tape Loop A; Affectionate Painful; Inward Curve; Tape Loop B 1; Tape Loop B II; Tape Loop B III; Eighth Pose; Stir; Release; Little Known; Tape Loop C I; Tape Loop C II; Tape Loop C III; Tape Loop D. (62:04)
Personnel: BlankFor.ms, electronics, tape loops, processing; Jason Moran, piano; Marcus Gilmore, drums.
Ordering info: redhookrecords.com

ladyy birdd
Tomorrow's Yesterday
INNOVA

★★★½

For some, the technique of turning knobs requires as much practice and study as does any given musical instrument. Gina Izzo floats into this discourse, pairing the diverse sounds she can make on her flute with an array of analog effects pedals, creating layered dreamscapes of hypnotic atmosphere. Her solo debut explores "threshold consciousness," the transitional state from wakefulness to sleep; one must be careful when listening to this album in the car (as this reviewer discovered). Izzo deserves a bow for the innovative usage of her flute as the gravitational origin of such beautifully lush sonic clouds. But sometimes the subtleties of texture and flavor get lost in an omnipresent creaminess, like sampling too many kinds of brie at the charcuterie table.

That said, there are plenty of crunchy moments to savor. Izzo is able to generate rhythmic beats through some dexterous tonguing, heard most effectively on "When We Say Goodbye." "Mirror(s)" features some of the most impressive solo flute improvising of the entire album. Guest alto saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins provides some inspired playing that vacillates between thoughtful and scintillating. Ambrose Akinmusire also lends his singular trumpet sound to a few pieces. "Shadow Boxing" features percussionist Ian Rosenbaum in one of the set's most energetic offerings. Closing track "Still," with the aid of Erika Dohi's detuned Juno synthesizer, brings the album to a place of urgency, like the restlessness that stirs us from the land of dreams into the new morning. *—Gary Fukushima*

Tomorrow's Yesterday: Still (Introduction); Into What Is Wanted; When You Fall asleep; Tomorrow's Yesterday; Mirror(s); Stay Leave; Dream Within A Dream; When We Say Goodbye; Where Do We Go; False Awakening; Shadow Boxing; Two Ends Of A Burning Candle; Still. (42:47)
Personnel: Gina Izzo, flute, effects; Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet (4, 9); Erika Dohi, Juno synthesizer (13); Nick Dunston, bass (2, 9, 13); Ian Rosenbaum, percussion (6, 11); Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone (2, 6, 9).
Ordering info: innova.mu

Kurt Elling & Charlie Hunter
SuperBlue: The Iridescent Spree
EDITION
★★★½

One expects certain things from a Kurt Elling album: inventive vocal takes on typically instrumental jazz standards, buttery smooth takes on the American Songbook, top-notch musicianship that stands firmly alongside Elling's voice. After he parted collaborative ways with Laurence Hobgood, it's been heartening to find he's sticking with his latest kindred spirits, guitarist Charlie Hunter, Butcher Brown keyboardist DJ Harrison and drummer Corey Fonville. *The Iridescent Spree* may be a sequel to 2021's *SuperBlue*, or perhaps the continuation of a beautiful friendship.

Funky is a good direction for Elling. He'd always gone there in flashes, but it's nice to hear him stretch further in this direction, turning it where it never thought to go, like Joni Mitchell's "Black Crow" or Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman." His take on Nate Smith's "Bounce" sounds so natural and lived in, he's essentially canonized a song that's barely over six years old (though Hunter was already cooking that up on this year's *Guilty Pleasures* EP).

That said, it does drip a little too heavily with Gen-X "What you know about this music, whippersnapper?" energy, as if 55-year-old Elling is saying, "Hey, we've still got it," in keeping up with the 56-year-old Hunter, who isn't a tourist in this sphere. Still, Elling is a dude from Chicago who has rocked a soul patch for decades. He's always had this in him, he just clearly knows it more now.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

SuperBlue–The Iridescent Spree: The Iridescent Spree: Black Crow; Freeman Square; Naughty Number Nine; Little Fairy Carpenter; Bounce It; Only The Lonely Woman; Right About Now; Not Here/Not Now; The Afterlife. (41:12)
Personnel: Kurt Elling, voice; Charlie Hunter, hybrid guitar; DJ Harrison, keyboards; Corey Fonville, drums; Elena Pinderhughes, flute (1); Jon Lampley, trumpet (3, 5, 8); Dan White, saxophone, horn arrangements (3, 5, 8); Chris Ott, trombone (3, 5, 8).
Ordering info: editionrecords.com

Plumb
Plumb
JMI/OUTSIDE IN
★★★★★

At two-and-a-quarter hours, *Plumb* pulls off the near miracle of maintaining surprise and revelation throughout it. But the achievement is greater still: The eponymous album by the unusual trio of tenor saxophonist David Murray, keyboardist/producer Ray Angry and drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson (both members of hip-hop band The Roots) is loaded with hooks, meaty improvisations and experimental weirdness, and not a one of them ever becomes tired. "Pleiades," a solo synth-noodling expedition for Angry, manages to be hooky, improvisational, and experimental all at once, even though it's a short connecting strand between two longer tunes (Murray's irresistible "Ninno" and the delicious collective workout "Atomic Number.")

Not that length — tunes here range from two minutes to 17 — implies superiority; "5 Minute Joint" (which actually overstates its length) has catchy funk for days, while Murray's four-minute solo bass clarinet feature "False Dawn" offers some of the album's tastiest licks and most alluring swing. That said, epic length does sometimes augur epic scope. "Pink Noise" is bifurcated between a nearly dancefloor-ready Questlove

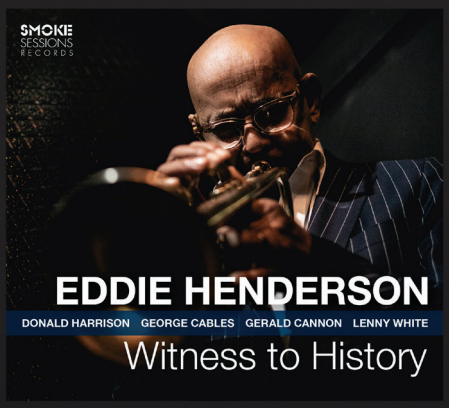
groove and a fluttering cooldown. "Brown Doves" is an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink suite.

While Murray is as creative and technically fluid as ever, and Questlove is on point (though he trades more in funk figures than hip-hop beats here), *Plumb* is Angry's showcase. He brings the hip-hop juice, the widest variety of moods and colors and the most solo spotlights. If that's what it takes to forge such a masterpiece, let him have it.

—Michael J. West

Plumb: Plumb; Intro to Ninno/Ninno; Pleiades; Atomic Number; Scalene; Orgone Pyramid; 5 Minute Joint; False Dawn; Love; Light; Pink Noise; Whet; Brown Doves; Goodbye. (136:17)
Personnel: David Murray, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet (8); Ray Angry, keyboards; Questlove, drums.
Ordering info: outsideinmusic.com or jmirecordings.com

THE SOUND OF SMOKE



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Makiko Hirabayashi Trio
Meteora
ENJA/YELLOWBIRD
★★★★½

Pianist Makiko Hirabayashi, born in Japan but resident in Denmark since 1990, has been collaborating with bassist Klavs Hovman and percussionist Marilyn Mazur for almost a quarter century. They first came together in 2001 and have released five studio albums, beginning with 2006's *Makiko* and most recently 2017's *Where The Sea Breaks*.

The music on *Meteora*, named for a group of monasteries built in the 14th century in the Pindus mountains of Greece, is lush, melodic and recorded with astonishing precision. Hirabayashi's piano playing can be as emphatic and songful as Chris Illingworth of GoGo Penguin or the late Esbjörn Svensson, but when she reaches into its guts and plucks the strings it's like she's grabbing the listener's ear to say, pay attention, this part is key.

Hovman's bass clicks, chirps and groans, sometimes thick as tar, sometimes light as a falling twig. Each object Mazur strikes — and there seem to be hundreds — rattles at its own frequency without overshadowing any of the others, all miked to create the focus we have in our dreams. She taps the kit with the speed and accuracy of a bird diving into a pond after a fish, sweeps chimes like a spring breeze and bows cymbals like a haunted house warning new tenants away. The 11 tracks unfold like a single journey through constantly changing scenery, but it's as if we are capable of seeing everything we pass in microscopic detail, through train windows that have been squeegeed to a nearly impossible clarity. —*Phil Freeman*

Meteora: Warp; Birds Ascending; The Door; Chestnut Alley; Meaningful Encounter; Skorpio Recital; Meteor; Infinity; Desert Rose; Kilden; Slip. (45:30)
Personnel: Makiko Hirabayashi, piano; Klavs Hovman, bass; Marilyn Mazur, drums and percussion.
Ordering info: enjarecords.com

Idris Ackamoor & The Pyramids
Afro Futuristic Dreams
STRUT
★★★★½

A sprawling journey, decades in the making, *Afro Futuristic Dreams* further expands the musical consciousness that Idris Ackamoor & The Pyramids have been cultivating since the 1970s. Bandleader and saxophonist Ackamoor's compositions and arrangements call upon a wide range of African diasporic musical traditions, including spiritual jazz, Afrobeat, reggae and psychedelic rock, while also bringing a propulsive energy that is uniquely theirs. *Afro Futuristic Dreams* tackles the isolation, violence and turmoil we've been living through with renewed hope and effervescent joy.

While previous albums have been more pointed in their political and social commentary, *Afro Futuristic Dreams* is more focused on how we move forward from here. "Thank You God" majestically, jubilantly calls for peace and unity. "Police Dem" channels Fela Kuti's political activism to tackle police brutality and institutional racism. The Pyramids chant, "Now we have to stand tall, face what all the world saw," while intersecting Afrobeat rhythms back Ackamoor's clarion lines.

Afro Futuristic Dreams is resistance music for our times, standing on the shoulders of ancestral wisdom to evoke joyful revelry and collective solidarity. —*Ivana Ng*

Afro Futuristic Dreams: Afro Futuristic Dreams; Thank You God; Police Dem; First Peoples; Truth To Power; Re-Memory; Garland Rose; Requiem For The Ancestors; Nice It Up. (68:31)
Personnel: Idris Ackamoor, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, piano, Hammond organ, didgeridoo, thunder sticks, pan flutes, rain sticks, bells, bass mbira, tenor mbira, talking drum, cymbal tree, vocals; Margaux Simmons, flute, Native American flute, poetry, vocals; Bobby Cobb, guitar, vocals; Daria Nile, Queen Califia, vocals; Sandra Poindexter, violin, vocals; Vincent Tolliver, viola; Laura Boytz, cello; Aaron Priskorn, trumpet; Greg Stephens, trombone; Heshima Mark Williams, acoustic bass; Ruben Ramos Medina, electric bass; George Hearst, drums; Bradie Speller, handsonic, congas, percussion; Ernesto Marichales, drums, congas, percussion; John Notaro, drums (4); Ben Maddox, keyboard effects (4).
Ordering info: idrisackamoor.bandcamp.com

Allison Miller
Rivers In Our Veins
ROYAL POTATO FAMILY
★★★★

Extraordinary composing, orchestrating, bandleading and a sophisticated, engaged and playful ensemble characterize *Rivers In Our Veins*, Allison Miller's ninth album. Also: Tap dancers.

An upbeat, out-reaching drummer who celebrates her collaborators in imaginative, constantly changing narratives, Miller here offers a high-concept, 12-song cycle with a serious environmental theme, happily more evocative than didactic. The tracks, most over five minutes in length, stand full and rich on their own, themes rising and slipping around like crosscurrents, meandering on apparent tangents that resolve further on without sacrificing flow.

The band's broad instrumental palette enables timbral variety and depth. In the seven-minute "Of Two Rivers Part 1," Miller's crew credibly turns a dour hoedown — subverted by Goldberg's improbably funny low contra-alto clarinet part — into a New Orleans-inspired second line celebration, Palmer's trumpet leading through a collectively improvised thicket that subsides for a tight ending. Part two is equally eventful — the dancers' hot toes introducing bouncy, Brazilian-touched sass, Miller with brushes on toms and active foot-drumming, Sickafoose in the pocket, Staaf fresh on Rhodes — then two-thirds through there's a distorted stop-time smear that launches an episode of clarinet over drum.

Scheinman's pizzicato and arco violin always adds fascinating dimensions that multiply in contact with a multifarious Goldberg (drawing on Sephardic scales, going Xtreme on "Shipyards"). "For The Fish" makes the case for tap in jazz. Music runs through *Rivers*. —*Howard Mandel*

Rivers In Our Veins: Of Two Rivers (Part One); Of Two Rivers (Part Two); Water; Hudson; Fierce; For The Fish; Blue Wild Indigo; GO!; Shipyards; Riparian Love; Potomac; The Dancing Tide. (65:59)
Personnel: Allison Miller, drums, percussion, vibraphone; Jenny Scheinman, violin; Jason Palmer, trumpet; Ben Goldberg, clarinet, contra-alto clarinet; Carmen Staaf, piano, Rhodes, accordion; Todd Sickafoose, bass; Claudia Rahardjanoto, Michelle Dorrance, Elizabeth Burke, Byron Tittle, Orlando Hernandez, tap dancers.
Ordering info: royalpotatofamily.com

Sam Martinelli with Ken Peplowski
Jazz Meets The Great Brazilian Songbook
INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★★

If you're going to mix jazz with the Brazilian songbook, it helps to stick with top-shelf songwriters. Brazilian drummer Sam Martinelli and American clarinetist-saxophonist Ken Peplowski have joined forces to produce this new collection of sambas, choros, bossa novas and MPB classics by Brazil's finest tunesmiths.

Martinelli and Peplowski do them justice. Their clarinet-drum duet on the Pixinguinha choro "Ande Ligeiro" comprises a stunning conversational call and response, while "Pra Dizer Adeus," co-written by Edu Lobo and Chico Buarque, features Peplowski's breathy tenor. Legendary songwriters Antonio Carlos Jobim and Ivan Lins are also ably represented by a dancing "A Correntaza (The Stream)" and the joyous "Madalena," respectively. The former features a delightful chorus by pianist Ehud Asherie, the latter an enchanting out-chorus that could have continued indefinitely.

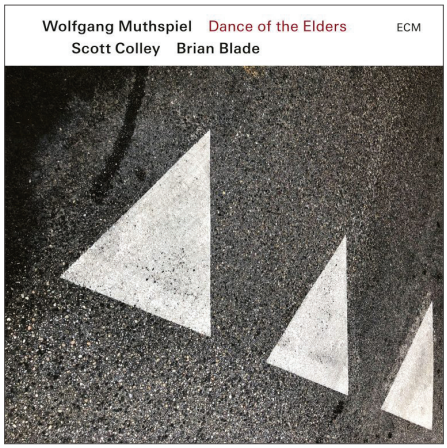
Most moving, though, is Martinelli's own contribution to the Songbook: the closing track "Serenade To A Friend (for Claudio Roditi)." If that burnished solo trumpet at the start sounds suspiciously like the Rio de Janeiro-born trumpeter (who passed in 2020), it's because it is. Martinelli reached back to his own 2018 effort *Crossing Paths*, on which Roditi appeared, and created an audio collage from segments of one of his late friend and mentor's solos.

—Larry Appelbaum

Jazz Meets The Great Brazilian Songbook: Se E Tarde Me Perdoa; Bahia Com; Ande Ligeiro; Pra Dizer Adeus; Sabado Em Copacabana; A Correntaza (The Stream); Valsa Brasileira; Madalena; Serenade To My Friend (for Claudio Roditi). (49:24)
Personnel: Sam Martinelli, drums; Ken Peplowski, clarinet, saxophone; Carina Calisto, vocal; Martin Wind, bass; Ehud Asherie, piano.
Ordering info: samuelmartinelli.com

Wolfgang Muthspiel
Dance Of The Elders
ECM

★★★★



A reference to Bach; a Liebeslied (albeit the Brecht/Weill one); a "Cantus"; and a "Folksong": Those could be enough on their own to tempt the suggestion that this is a "typical" ECM recording (of course, no such hippogriff exists). The mixture of jazz, classical and folk is one of the label's defining characteristics, but here's a set that has moved some distance from the founding sound of John Abercrombie and Terje Rypdal.

Muthspiel has been a quiet presence on the scene ever since his fine debut recordings for Amadeo in the early '90s. He and trombone-playing brother Christian were never going to be the Breckers; they seemed bound on a more reflective path, and Wolfgang's elegant work, shaped by his classical training, was never quite barnstorming enough to elevate him into conventional stardom.

But what a trio this is. Colley and Blade, who made *Angular Blues* with him five years ago, are effortlessly musical. Together they have something of the empathy of the Bill Evans trio, with out-of-body improvisation on the opening "Invocation" and a sweet communicability on the closing "Amelia" (the Joni Mitchell tune, which, let's remember, is as apocalyptic as it is lovely). If some of it sounds like it might belong in a classical recital hall, and some on a high-tech version of a back porch, that's all to the good and no sign of creative confusion. Like all "typical" ECM releases, the synthesis matters more than the elements, and the synthesis here is hugely confident and successful.

—Brian Morton

Dance Of The Elders: Invocation; Prelude To Bach; Dance Of The Elders; Liebeslied; Folksong; Cantus Bradus; Amelia. (45:51)
Personnel: Wolfgang Muthspiel, guitars; Scott Colley, bass; Brian Blade, drums.
Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

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The Danish Connection

Fifty-one years ago, Nils Winther launched Copenhagen-based SteepleChase Records, whose catalog now numbers more than 1,000 titles. Still recording young talent at 79, Winther retrospects with his autumn releases, presenting 1,080g audiophile LP reissues of strong dates by tenor saxophonists Dexter Gordon (1975), Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis (1983) and Jimmy Heath (1991), and first-ever commercial issues of concerts by the Count Basie Orchestra (1962) and the Jimmy Giuffre Trio opposite a Gene Krupa-led quartet (1959).

***Bouncin' With Dex* (38:47 ★★★★½)** is this writer's favorite of the seven studio albums Gordon made for SteepleChase between 1974 and 1976. Not that his solo declamations are any more logical, kinetic or suavely soulful than on *The Apartment* or *Biting The Apple*, but the rhythm section — pianist Tete Montoliu, drummer Billy Higgins and bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen — keeps the listener on their toes from start to finish, responding with an unpredictable edge as Gordon swings melodically on bop classics "Billie's Bounce" and "Four," a tricky Rhythm number called "Benji's Bounce" and an original tango titled "Catalonian Nights."

Only three years his junior, Jimmy Heath was deeply influenced by Gordon in formative years. Heath preferred ensemble contexts for which he could compose and arrange over blowing dates, but finds a happy medium between spontaneity and structure on ***You've Changed* (49:02 ★★★★)**, his first of two on SteepleChase with his working quartet of guitarist Tony Purrone, bassist Ben Brown and drummer Albert "Tootie" Heath, his younger brother. He applies his warm, elegant, avuncular sound, recognizable in one note, to three contrafacts, Mal Waldron's "Soul Eyes" and the balladic title track.

On ***All Of Me* (46:11 ★★★★½)**, Lockjaw Davis' second SteepleChase outing, a resourceful rhythm section (Kenny Drew, the label's primary pianist during the '70s; bassist Jesper Lundgaard; and drummer Svend-Erik Nørregaard) spurs Jaws through declarative, robust improvisations on eight pieces, all medium to medium-up (excepting "That's All," a tender croon), marked by the dancing time feel and turbulent, growling timbre that instantly IDs his instrumental voice. The group circumvents monotony with subtle touches; Drew follows Davis' stentorian oratory on the changes of "Funky Fluke" with a hymn-like solo, while a slow drag sax-bass duo on "There Is No Greater Love" precedes the open floodgates.

Davis internalized such nuances during three runs with the Count Basie Orchestra, although he wasn't present in 1962, when the band visited Scandinavia twice, including a May 29 show at Copenhagen's Falkoner Centret. ***Count Basie & His Orchestra In Concert* (78:59 ★★★★)** captures the band's unique dynamics, time feel and breathe-as-one synchronicity before an enthusiastic audience. O.C. Smith channels Joe Williams on "There Will Never Be Another You," "Young And Foolish" and "Alright, Okay, You Win," while blues chanteuse Irene Reid is formidable on "I Got Rhythm," "Backwater Blues" and "Alexander's Ragtime Band." The brass section is showcased on "Easin' It," Eric Dixon on "Segue In C" and "You Are Too Beautiful," Frank Foster on "Jumpin' At The Woodside," Snooky Young on "Easy Money," Henry Coker on "The Song Is You" and Sonny Payne on "Old Man River." Freddie Green's well-captured rhythm guitar and Basie's piano oversee the just-so tempos.

Dexter Gordon

Also from the Falkoner Centret is ***Jimmy Giuffre Trio/Gene Krupa Quartet In Concert* (69:46 ★★★★)**. It's an odd confluence of modernism and tradition. Giuffre on clarinet and tenor, guitar-legend-to-be Jim Hall and bassist Buddy Clark nail the leader's contrapuntal, sometimes atonal repertoire (he called it "blues-based folk jazz") from the February 1959 session that generated *Seven Pieces* ("Song Of The Wind," "The Little Melody," "Time Machine") and a forthcoming August date (*The Easy Way*) that debuted Hall's oft-analyzed "Careful." On a set of good-old-good-ones, drum legend Krupa gives free rein to his progressive sidemen (the authoritative Ed Wasserman on tenor, flute and clarinet; and Ronnie Ball, a Tristano acolyte, on piano), swinging interactively on "Undecided," generating cogent trapset color on "Flamingo" and concluding with a 25-minute tour de force on his signature tune, "Sing Sing Sing." **DB**

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

Paul Wertico
Drums Without Boundaries
DA VINCI CLASSICS
★★★★

A seven-time Grammy winner who rose to fame in the '80s and '90s with the Pat Metheny Group, drummer Wertico has been pushing the envelope from behind the kit for decades. From his early Chicago-based group Earwax Patrol to his many outings as a leader, beginning with 1993's *The Yin And The Yout*, Wertico has been an uncommonly open-minded musician.

Now 70, the intrepid drummer-composer-bandleader has undertaken perhaps his most audacious project to date in the company of the Italian Ichos Percussion Quintet. The results are as bold as they are uncategorizable.

The ensemble shifts nimbly from Scaglia's Latin-flavored opener "Alchimia" to his free-boppish "Black Two" to Wertico's freewheeling percussion jam "Corner Conversation," highlighting the versatility of this project. Guitarist Alex Munk contributes a skronky, distortion-laced solo on the groove-heavy section of vibraphonist Mirko Pedrotti's suite-like "Hunting," while Scaglia's delicate and melancholy "Sicily" has echoes from John Abercrombie's ECM songbook.

But perhaps the most daring pieces, aside from an 11-minute deconstruction of John Cage's "Third Construction," are Wertico's dynamic and somewhat cacophonous drumming showcases, like "Somewhere In Between," "Time Well Served," "Three Movements In Movement" and "You Can Get There From Here." Thrilling, though not for the faint-hearted. *—Bill Milkowski*

Drums Without Boundaries: Alchimia; Black Two; Corner Conversation; Hunting; Sicily; Urban Mood; Somewhere In Between; Simple Land; Time Well Served; Three Movements In Movement; You Can Get There From Here; Deconstructing John Cage's Third Construction. (60:00)

Personnel: Paul Wertico, drums and percussion; Gianmarco Scaglia, bass; Alex Munk, guitar; Mirko Pedrotti, vibraphone; John Moulder, guitar (7, 11); Ichos Percussion Quintet: Luca Vanoli, glockenspiel, Giorgio Calvo, marimba, Fabio Zuliani, marimba, Gianmaria Romanenghi, timpani, percussion, Nicolò Giovanni Demurtas, percussion.

Ordering info: davinci-edition.com

Bushman's Revenge
All The Better For Seeing You
IS IT JAZZ?
★★★½

After 20 years and 11 albums, certain things can be expected from Bushman's Revenge. Everyone who played on the power trio's first album, *Cowboy Music*, appears on *All The Better For Seeing You*. Guitarist Even Helte Hermansen remains the principal writer, and he continues to give wiseacre names — "Raptus Norvegicus" references a Stranglers album — to compositions that balance rock energy with jazz fluidity.

But the balance of ingredients has shifted over time. Metal, which used to be a basic food group, is rarely on the menu these days. Nilssen's drumming contributes immeasurably to the music's wider dynamic range, adding shape and shading during its more melodic passages. He ushers in "Halvannen Time (an hour and a half, no more)" with soft brushes, pushing pliable tones around Rune Nergaard's spare bass figures while Hermansen layers spacy, country-tinged lines that owe more to Bill Frisell than the guitarist's original hero, Ace Frehley. The performance is so elegant, it doesn't matter how referential the music is.

The next track, "Last Cup Of Zorro," moves further down the pitch spectrum, contrasting twangy baritone guitar with shimmering synthetic tones, but it's still in the same rodeo. "Hollowed Be Thy Name" passes through episodes of intricate fingerpicking and questing melodic variations for nearly eight minutes before yielding to the sort of heavy riffing that would once have been the trio's default mode. While the album's long epics are impressively executed, the passages of distilled lyricism are more rewarding. —*Bill Meyer*

All The Better For Seeing You: Halvannen Time (an hour and a half, no more); Last Cup Of Zorro; Hollowed Be Thy Name; Stolen From A Blind Monkey; Raptus Norvegicus; Takk For Seg. (42:47)
Personnel: Even Helte Hermansen, guitars; Rune Nergaard, bass; Gard Nilssen, drums.
Ordering info: isitjazzrecords.no

Willie Morris
Conversation Starter
POSI-TONE
★★★½

Personal, passionate tunes rule *Conversation Starter*, saxophonist Willie Morris' fine debut. Whether it's a ballad like Horatio Spafford's "It Is Well With My Soul" or the driving "Azar," Morris plays with urgency and conviction. As befits the album title, the tracks, all originals save for the Spafford and a bracing update of Joe Henderson's angular "Isotope," stress the dialogue for which Morris yearns.

Take the title tune, a fascinating way to cap this substantial, swinging disc. Adi Meyerson's bass launches the track. Nearly two minutes pass before drummer EJ Strickland and pianist Jon Davis join in asymmetrically, Strickland a touch martial as Morris' tenor saxophone and Patrick Cornelius' alto saxophone circle each other. Thoughtful but fevered, this fundamentally playful tune builds into a conversation designed to transcend babble. It's a kind of commentary on "Keep Talking," this rich album's longest, even more complex track.

An homage to key Morris influence Henderson, "Keep Talking" takes a while to gel, but Morris eventually takes over to ground it, unfurling brief, probing flights that lead

to one of Davis' most interesting solos. This band's not-so-secret weapon, Davis is in full gallop here, daring Strickland and Meyerson to keep up. Already quite an aural presentation, the tune isn't done yet. Meyerson's solo, deliberate yet flashy in a bass kind of way, gives its restatement a gravity that it lacked up front. —*Carlo Wolff*

Conversation Starter: Tina's Dream; St. Upton Hin; Cries; It Is Well With My Soul; The Strength Of Those Who Bear The Burden; Keep Talking; Introspective; Isotope; Azar; Conversation Starter. (55:46)
Personnel: Willie Morris, tenor saxophone; Patrick Cornelius, alto saxophone, alto flute (2); Jon Davis, piano; Adi Meyerson, bass; EJ Strickland, drums.
Ordering info: posi-tone.com

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Bobby Kapp & Richard Sussman

Synergy: Bobby Kapp Plays The Music Of Richard Sussman

TWEED BOULEVARD

★★★★½

Drummer Bobby Kapp is probably best known for his association with the jazz avant garde, including recordings with Marion Brown, Dave Burrell, Matthew Shipp and Ivo Perelman. However, he has also performed in more boppish settings, including co-leadership of the Fine Wine Trio with pianist Richard Wyands and bassist Gene Perla.

For *Synergy*, Kapp (who mostly assumes a quiet and supportive role) gathered together an intriguing group to perform the compositions and arrangements of pianist Richard Sussman. While working with everyone from Lionel Hampton and Lee Konitz to Steve Slagle and Randy Brecker, Sussman (who made his recording debut in 1977) also developed into a notable composer whose originals are full of unpredictable moments.

Using an ensemble on *Synergy* that includes bass clarinet or clarinet, French horn, violin and tenor on the front line plus his piano in the rhythm section, Sussman presents music that is harmonically advanced, sets mysterious atmospheres, swings over complex chord changes and is often rhythmically catchy.

The pianist's chord voicings are as original as his themes and set the mood for each piece. There are many fine individual moments with Burton's playing bringing back the spirit of John Coltrane, John Clark's French horn adding to the density of the ensembles and the variety of the solos, and Aaron Irwin playing a rhythmic pattern on "Trance Dance" that is the basis of the song.

But it is Sussman's writing, which is inspired by both modern jazz and 20th-century classical music, that gives *Synergy* its own fresh musical personality. —*Scott Yanow*

Synergy–Bobby Kapp Plays The Music Of Richard Sussman: Tweed Boulevard; Infinite Mobility; Inner Space; From The Heart; Synergy; Trance Dance; Whirling Dervish; Radioactive. (55:17)
Personnel: Bobby Kapp, drums; Richard Sussman, piano; Zach Brock, violin; Aaron Irwin, clarinet, bass clarinet; Abraham Burton, tenor saxophone; John Clark, French horn; Harvie S, bass.

Ordering info: richardsussmanjazz.com

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JEFF FASANO

Mitch Woods

Truth Comes Home

Mitch Woods: *Friends Along The Way* (Club 88; 48:14/42:07 ★★★★) Blues-and-boogie piano ace Mitch Woods has reissued an album that a half-baked record company consigned to the dustbin upon its first release in 2017. It's now back as a "Double CD Deluxe Edition," with the addition of five formerly lost tracks. In mostly duo or trio performances, the Bay Area-based showman extols the joy he takes in keeping company with almost a dozen pals updating classic blues and R&B treasures. Elvin Bishop has a magnetism as imposing as Woods', together building a head of steam on "Keep A Dollar In Your Pocket" and "Saturday Night Boogie Woogie Man." James Cotton joins the swaggering piano man onboard "Chicago Express" for full-throttle fun. A jokey sort of sensuality colors the music of Maria Muldaur and Woods upon sharing Bessie Smith's "Empty Bed Blues." Van Morrison and Taj Mahal wrest new emotional substance out of three old favorites, including "C.C. Rider." John Lee Hooker and Woods touch each other's heart and soul, ruminating over human weariness on "Never Get Out Of These Blues Alive." There are no slouches. Neither is Woods the singer, heard on 10 songs.

Ordering info: mitchwoods.com

Coco Montoya: *Writing On The Wall* (Alligator; 58:52 ★★★★) During the almost three decades since leaving John Mayall for a solo career, Coco Montoya has worked up a striking synthesis of blues, rock and soul of his own. He sounds as if reaching across time to his mentor-employer Albert Collins while staying alert to the present-day blues clime. His sixth Alligator album may be the most convincing showcase of his richness of spirit. His singing voice has strength and natural ease, making all the expressive points about erratic romance, and his controlled, dynamically sensitive guitar work befits someone who's considerably more than an expert technician. Songs written by the youthful 71-year-old and colleagues Jeff Paris and Dave Steen are of high quality. Ballads are particularly memorable: Montoya wears his heart on his sleeve as never before on "What Did I Say?" and his upside-down Stratocaster on "The Three Kings And Me" (B.B., Albert and Freddie, of course) puts ambrosia in our ears. Lonnie Mack's "Stop" gets stamped by a mournful authority. The unneeded guest guitarists are Ronnie Baker Brooks and Lee Roy Parnell.

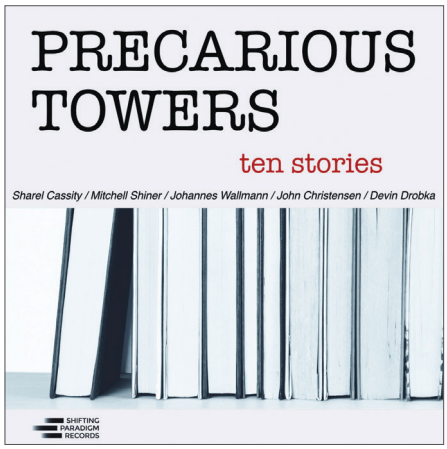
Ordering info: alligator.com

John Mayall's Bluesbreakers: *Live In 1967, Volume Three* (Forty Below; 40:18 ★★★½) As with the previous volumes, the third and final installment in this series of "never before heard" reel-to-reel tape recordings made by a fan has the April/May 1967 edition of Mayall's band in top form in London clubs. (Sound quality is passable.) Peter Green, just 20, proves just as much a superpower as the bloke he replaced 10 months earlier, Eric Clapton. His signature way on a Gibson Les Paul achieves optimum understated expression. Green's uncanny melodic sense and hollow out-of-phase sound reilluminate Otis Rush's "Double Trouble" and others with significance. In the shadow of the guitarist, Mayall sings in his usual odd emulation of J.B. Lenoir. Note: Volumes 1 and 2 have lots more Green solos, longer running times.

Ordering info: fortybelowrecords.com

Dave Keller: *It's Time To Shine* (Tastee Tone; 51:51 ★★★★) One of the Northeast's few world-class blues artists, Dave Keller did something different for his 10th album: He ensconced himself and band in a remote upstate New York cabin for a week and recorded original songs live. He wanted to get a raw feeling for spontaneous sensation; mission accomplished. Equally confident and individualistic as a singer, guitarist and tunesmith, the Vermonter works his long-time fascination with bygone soul-blues (horns and backup vocals added remotely later) and pounds out alluring blues-rock numbers about fickle women or social equality. Unsung hero: Ira Friedman, on organ. **DB**

Ordering info: davekeller.com



Precarious Towers
Ten Stories
SHIFTING PARADIGM
★★★½

For a quintet named Precarious Towers, this group sounds like it's on solid ground. This Midwestern five-piece is tight, following interesting ideas while never veering too far from a clear, straightahead sound. Mitchell Shiner's vibraphone resounds clearly, providing focus where the rest of this band tends to follow, particularly alongside Sharel Cassity's alto saxophone.

The tightness of "Same River, Once" just can't be beat. It's a composition with the narrative gravity of heisting a hot apple pie off a windowsill. "Non-Non" has all the precision of an engineered sports car, stripped down to Devin Drobka's percussion pounding like pistons while Shiner and Cassity mind the curves on the road. It's the perfect segue to the contemplative "Tone Poem," with Cassity changing things up on flute and matching the mood perfectly.

John Christensen's bass and Johannes Wallmann's runs on the piano round out this sturdy group. All five members are strong composers who think well on how this band can impress. Christensen's composition "Purpley" is one of the dreamiest songs one may hear this year, a ballad that sounds fresh out of the 1940s with no signs of ever touching mothballs. Everyone in this group can write this well and can appropriately stand up to the tasks presented. All things being equal — and they can't really get more equal than this — *Ten Stories* is a pretty good sophomore album from a group whose name may get easier to search online the more tales of their more-than-fitful playing together get out.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Precarious Towers: Journeyer; Same River, Once; Hutcherspired; Nice Day; Purpley; Non-Non; Tone Poem; Vega; Whistle In The Wind; Non-Non Outro. (48:13)
Personnel: Sharel Cassity, alto saxophone, flute; Mitchell Shiner, vibraphone; Johannes Wallmann, piano; John Christensen, bass; Devin Drobka, drums and cymbals.

Ordering info: shiftingparadigmrecords.bandcamp.com

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The human voice was the first musical instrument, creating sounds only limited by the singer's imagination. On their self-titled debut, ***säje* (Independent Release; 50:26 ★★★★)**, **säje** stretches out to explore those limits. The quartet — Sara Gazarek, Amanda Taylor, Johnaye Kendrick and Erin Bentlage — all have thriving solo careers and came together to share their love of composing and arranging. They chose the material and produced the sessions together. On the opening track, "Desert Song," Bentlage fingerpicks a ukulele as the quartet's harmonies and melismas describe the peace emanating from ocean waves and desert sunshine. The song was nominated for a Best Arrangement, Instrument and Vocals Grammy after its release as a single in 2020. On "Wisteria," the core trio of players — keyboardist Dawn Clement, bassist Ben Williams and drummer Christian Euman — hold back as the women step out, using their voices as instruments to weave a rich musical tapestry. "Solid Ground/Blackbird" blends Michael Kiwanuka's song of self-reliance with the familiar Beatles song. The women use soaring harmonic interplay to intensify feelings of dread and liberation.

Ordering info: sajevoices.com

LAUREN DESBERG

säje explores the limits.

New York's **Allan Harris** is a prolific singer, composer and guitarist with 12 albums to his credit. ***Live At Blue LLama* (Love; 66:02 ★★★)** showcases his rich baritone, as he brings new life to a collection of standards and original compositions. The performances were recorded over two evenings and present many aspects of his vocal skills. He croons, growls, hums and sprinkles understated melismas throughout "Jeannine" and his own "New Day." His command of scat singing is impressive on his rendition of "The Very Thought Of You," while his interpretation of Eddie Jefferson's vocalese lyrics for Miles Davis' "So What?" is also notable. The piano work and arrangements of Arco Iris Sandoval shine.

Ordering info: loveproductionsrecords.com

Lenora Zenzalai Helm composed the suite of songs that make up ***Journeywoman* (Zenzalai Music; 61:40 ★★★)** in 2003. She put off recording most of it as she went through a process of rearranging and distilling the music and vocals into their current form. Backed by her Tribe Jazz Orchestra Nonet, Helm presents the story of a Black woman's path through the joys, frustrations and harrowing realities of life. "Beauty," a bluesy ballad, opens things on a high note, with Helm's trills and extended notes describing the spiritual beauty of womankind. Her restrained vocals heighten the drama of "Sweet Sixteen," a tale of abuse and revenge, with Salome Bey's smooth saxophone solo adding a touch of solace. Helm returns to more uplifting subjects on the swinging "Sister Joy" and the bossa nova title track.

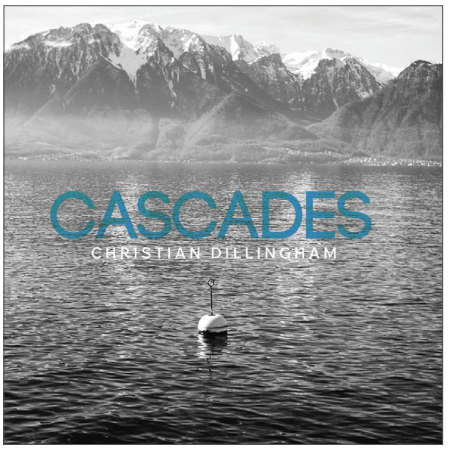
Ordering info: lenorahelm.com

Double Grammy winner **Jack Jones** has a large catalogue of swing, pop and jazz albums to his name. He cut ***ArtWork* (BFD; 66:09 ★★★)** with the help of his friend Joey DeFrancesco, who died shortly after the session's completion, giving the project a bittersweet aura. The tunes are pop standards, given Jones' usual discrete treatment. He sings Peggy Lee's rewrite of "Fever" with cheeky ad libs, backed by DeFrancesco's minimal organ. DeFrancesco also adds his melancholy touch to "This Masquerade," complementing Jones' aching vocal. Jacques Brel's "If You Go Away" is a subtle tearjerker with a full orchestra, as is the album closer "One Day," with Jones' poignant delivery undercutting the upbeat lyric.

Ordering info: jackjones.lolipop.jp

Douyé brings an African feel to her take on the Great American Songbook on ***The Golden Sekeré* (Rhombus; 62:38 ★★★★)**. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, the singer grew up listening to American pop, R&B and jazz, as well as African stars like Fela Kuti. On *Golden Sekeré*, she enlists the help of several American-based African compatriots, including Lionel Loueke, Dapo Torimiro and Baba Ken Okulolo. Their arrangements lean into her Nigerian roots, while her vocals display the subtle warmth of a seasoned jazz singer. "Speak Low" has a laid-back Afro/Latin groove, with Douyé's almost whispered vocal adding fervor to the song's prayer for love and connection. "I've Got You Under My Skin" appears twice: once with a big band augmented by a dynamic African percussion section, and again in a lowkey Palm Wine Music arrangement that emphasizes the quiet fervor of Douyé's singing. **DB**

Ordering info: rhombus-records.com



Christian Dillingham
Cascades
GREENLEAF
★★★½

Open-eared bassist, composer and bandleader Christian Dillingham, whose resume ranges from Alarm Will Sound to Chico Freeman to Kirk Franklin, is of two or more minds when it comes to genre "code switching." This much is telegraphed in "The Bottoms," the opening track to his debut album, *Cascades*. While fundamentally a straight and tuneful medium-heat jazz tune, the solo section turns abruptly left, with guitarist Dave Miller doubling up on the snaky solo section, each voice at microtonal odds with the others à la Ornette Coleman's Prime Time.

If the discourse on that track leaves us a bit confused, the rest of the eclectic 10-track program adheres to more recognizable identities. His nimble quartet proceeds with highly empathic ease across the shuffle-turned-bop "Like No Other," the rock-tinged snarl of "Code Switch" and the atmospheric murk of "Lost In Desolation."

One of the standout tracks, "One Breath," contrasts its rhythmic bed of fast swing/briskly walking bass with slow, long-toned languidness from the distorted guitar and saxophone, an effective duality that melts into abstraction. But soon after, we land in an almost unabashed pop-soul zone with "Homeostasis" and the gospel-flavored "Undulation." Here, the production values and acoustic disconnect of remote "room"-sounding drums and the upfront clarity of the other instruments becomes a distraction.

More artful rewards are in store on the open, airy ambience — plus odd-time melodic riff — of "No Froust" and the lovely, darkish waltz ballad "Someday Soon." *Cascades* flows in several impressive directions, a promising debut for Dillingham despite the occasional sideways slide into less-alluring musical turf. *—Josef Woodard*

Cascades: The Bottoms; Like No Other; South State Line Road; One Breath; Lost In Desolation; Homeostasis; No Froust; Undulation; Someday Soon; Code Switch. (65:12)
Personnel: Christian Dillingham, bass; Lenard Simpson, alto and soprano saxophone; Dave Miller, guitar; Greg Artry, drums.

Ordering info: greenleafmusic.com

Michael Echaniz

Michael Echaniz
Seven Shades Of Violet (Rebiralost)
RIDGEWAY
★★★★

You don't want to hear what Michael Echaniz has been through: no special pleading here. *Seven Shades Of Violet* would be a great record even if Echaniz had only gone through a bit of writer's block and label indifference, rather than stage four lymphoma, a blood cancer that means business.

Echaniz is fascinated by mathematics and color, the former sometimes as much a turn-off as a medical back story dangled for sympathy. But his interest is profound, and even if titles like "Proxima Centauri" seem to flirt with the slide-rule qualities of '70s prog, the results are quite different. Music of great metrical complexity, yes, but not just as a series of equations, Fibonacci sequences and integrals.

His music has an almost synaesthetic quality, and if you don't believe that exists, try the bluesy (!) title track or "Prince Of Darkness." This is music of profound and highly communicative feeling. When Echaniz digs into his Basque roots on "Gernika (Bask Balms)" (we're more familiar with the Picasso spelling), it's clear that something profound has been stirred. Just imagine how a man of his heritage might feel after four years of being bombarded more metaphorically with chemo and transplants. There's no "cancer's a battlefield" oversharing, but the analogy between his own experience and that of the raped city is one to pull up the most hardened cynic.

The band name, Rebiralost, needs a gloss. It's an anagram of *bertsolari*, a singer of improvised songs in Basque culture, part of that great oral-formulaic tradition that surrounds the Mediterranean. And, yes, these are songs and the vocalists are absolutely central to the group.

Creative endeavor may well be a kind of remission from the fusillade of confusions the world presents. We wish him well, but no pity points here: This is simply great, challenging music. *—Brian Morton*

Seven Shades Of Violet (Rebiralost): Prologue; Seven Shades Of Violet; Proxima Centauri; Clockwork (Un carillon à musique); Interlude; Prince Of Darkness; Edulretni; Everything Is Embarrassing; Gernika (Bask Balms); Faintaisie 73; Epilogue. (56:40)
Personnel: Michael Echaniz, keyboards; Erik Jekabson, trumpet; John Gove, trombone; Shay Salhov, alto saxophone; Dan Zinn, tenor saxophone; Jeff Denson, bass, vocals; Dillon Vado, drums, percussion; Silvestre Martinez, percussion; Friction Quartet, strings; Danielle Wertz, Molly Pease, vocals.

Ordering info: ridgewayrecords.com

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Brandon Sanders
Compton's Finest
SAVANT
★★★★

Drummer Brandon Sanders's debut, *Compton's Finest,* is a program of mostly standards. As leader, he offers the record as space to showcase the immense talents of his collaborators (and friends). The result is pleasant listening and the sound it produces is perhaps best described as sincere. It is, as that term signifies, unadulterated. This is music that is sure of itself. And if Sanders is not out to prove anything, it is clear that this sincerity is enough.

As the album's title indicates, Sanders hails from Compton, the home of many of the music's stalwarts. But it was only after attending the University of Kansas, where he played basketball for the Jayhawks and obtained a master's degree in social work, that he turned his attention to the drums. After attending Berklee, Sanders has plotted out an impressive career collaborating with bands and leading his own in New York, including regularly at the iconic Sista's Place.

Though the band uses the standards to shine, there are also two original compositions that deserve some mention. On the title track, we find the band lilting toward the territory of straightahead jazz, with vibraphonist Warren Wolf and bassist Eric Wheeler providing rousing solos.

On the other original, "SJB," Sanders' pen recalls the likes of Horace Silver and fellow Angeleno Horace Tapscott. With star vocalist Jazzmeia Horn covering "I Can't Help It" and "In A Sentimental Mood," *Compton's Finest* is indeed sincere, and it will have staying power.

—Joshua Myers

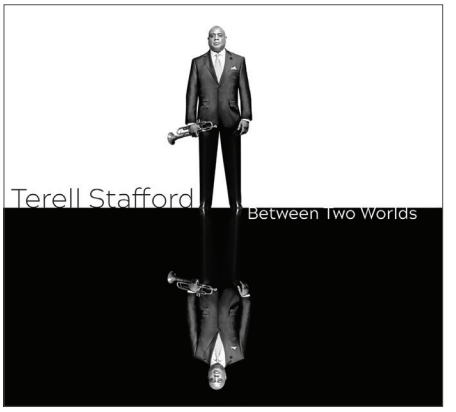
Compton's Finest: Softly As In A Morning Sunrise; Compton's Finest; I Can't Help It; Voyage; Body And Soul; Monk's Dream; In A Sentimental Mood; SJB. (39:39)
Personnel: Brandon Sanders, drums; Warren Wolf, vibraphone; Chris Lewis, tenor saxophone; Keith Brown, piano, Eric Wheeler, bass; Jazzmeia Horn, vocals (3, 8).
Ordering info: brandonsandersmusic.com

Terell Stafford
Between Two Worlds
LE COQ
★★★★

One of the top straightahead hard-bop trumpeters in jazz (although he is also adept at playing classical music), Terell Stafford has been carving out an important career as the director of jazz studies at Temple University. However, his teaching duties have not affected either his progress as an improviser or his performing schedule. Stafford has been on more than 100 jazz record dates since 1991 and *Between Two Worlds* is at least his 11th album as a leader.

On this recent release, Stafford performs with an all-star sextet filled with his musical friends, including two of whom (Tim Warfield and Bruce Barth) he had previously recorded.

The set begins with three heated numbers: "Between New Worlds," the cheerful and celebratory "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" and Stafford's Afro-Cuban original "Mi A Mia." While those performances — which include blazing trumpet solos, high-powered saxophone and piano statements, hard-swinging bass and often-raging drums and percussion — are arguably the high points of the set, the other selections are well worth hearing, too. Stafford is particularly lyrical on "Two Hearts As One"



and McCoy Tyner's "You Taught My Heart To Swing," hinting at Freddie Hubbard a little on the latter and taking an inventive cadenza. In addition to explorations of pieces by Barth, Billy Strayhorn and Horace Silver, the program is topped off with a lowdown "Wruth's Blues" featuring a spectacular final solo from Stafford.

—Scott Yanow

Between Two Worlds: Between Two Worlds; Great Is Thy Faithfulness; Mi a Mia; Two Hearts As One Room 608; Blood Count; Manaus At Dusk; You Taught My Heart To Sing; Wruth's Blues. (63:34)
Personnel: Terell Stafford, trumpet, flugelhorn; Tim Warfield, tenor and soprano saxophones; Bruce Barth, piano; David Wong, bass; Johnathan Blake, drums; Alex Acuna, percussion.
Ordering info: lecoqrecords.com

Lucas Niggli playing games, making music

Lucas Niggli Sound Of Serendipity Tentet
Play!
INTAKT
★★★½

Who doesn't love games? For this 46-minute piece, divided into eight movements, drummer/composer Lucas Niggli created a collection of 40 playing cards that he distributed among 10 players from the Swiss jazz and improv scene. The three-round "game" was played over the course of two days in January 2023.

Here's the problem, though: This CD doesn't come with a deck of cards, closing off a potentially fruitful avenue of interpretation. (Yes, music created in response to graphic or otherwise unorthodox scores should be packaged with those scores.) The listener is left with nothing but the music. And based solely on the sounds, one would be hard-pressed not to think of this as Joana Maria Aderi's album, as her voice and electronics are quite prominent throughout; she seems to be operating in the tradition of avant-garde artists fascinated by language and the voice, like Laurie Anderson.

Other players who make a strong showing are accordionist Tizia Zimmermann and Hammond organ player Dominik Blum; on the final movement of *Play!*, Blum rises to peaks of ecstasy reminiscent of Deep Purple's Jon Lord.

Some of the sudden transitions and mildly kitschy vignettes may remind listeners with long memories of John Zorn's game pieces, but there are some diverting combinations of sounds. On "Movement 2," Marina Tantanozi's flute skitters and whirls above pulsing electronics and Christian Weber's thumping upright bass, eventually joined by shrill stabs from Helena Winkelman's violin. However this music was created and realized, it's more interesting than not. —*Phil Freeman*

Play!: Movement 1; Movement 2; Movement 3; Movement 4; Movement 5; Movement 6; Movement 7; Movement 8. (46:16)
Personnel: Joana Maria Aderi, voice/electronics; Silke Strahl, tenor saxophone; Marina Tantanozi, flute/electronics; Marc Unternährer, tuba; Helena Winkelman, violin; Tizia Zimmermann, accordion; Dominik Blum, Hammond organ; Christian Weber, bass; Peter Conradin Zumthor, drums, celesta; Lucas Niggli, drums, melodica.
Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

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Michael Cuscuna

GATEKEEPER TO VALHALLA

By John McDonough Photo by Jimmy and Dena Katz

Once upon a time, a tiny handful of early jazz critics wrote about rare old jazz records like priests talking about the Bible when most of the world couldn't even read. Like the lonely tree in the forest, early jazz history and legend constituted a silent saga you took on faith. The scriptures were closely held.

Then came the swing era, and reissues boomed. New fans demanded to hear the real evidence for themselves. A new breed of independent discographer began to emerge, part producer and part archeologist. Then George Avakian and Dave Dexter showed Columbia and Decca how to mint free money from their vaults. Packaging, prestige and regularity came to the reissue.

They and a select core of successors would turn graveyards of entombed performances into meticulously documented monuments. They would rescue reputations from obscurity and put the best of the past within reach of the present and future. They would secure rec-

ognition and even immortality for the overlooked and make a place where their bodies of work could live in perpetual honor and comfort. They are, in many ways, the gatekeepers to jazz's Valhalla.

Accordingly, this year DownBeat honors Michael Cuscuna for his lifetime of achievement in the recording industry, which includes production credits on more that 2,600 LPs and CDs, the preponderance of which have been reissues. Between 1985 and 2007 alone, he produced at least 60 reissues a year for Blue Note and its sister labels. "Except for a few artists," he says, "basically reissues kept us afloat. They were the pad that kept us in a profit position." It would be the training camp that prepared him for the definitive box collections on Mosaic Records, the label he founded in 1982 with Charlie Lourie.

Born in Stanford, Connecticut, in 1948, Cuscuna first got into music at the age of 9 or 10. "It was contemporary R&B on the radio at first," he recalled recently. "But I played drums on a little starter kit and got into drum records like Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich on Verve, then Max Roach and Art Blakey. When I started to hear the music around the drums, that's when I got completely hooked. I went through Benny Goodman, Dave Brubeck and the MJQ, until I caught up to what was going on around me around 1960.

"By age 14, I was going to Birdland, which had a peanut gallery. That's when I heard Blakey and the Messengers, the Coltrane Quartet and Miles. They became my passion and still are. It's the stuff that gets to you between about 12 and 25 that stays with you for life. You never absorb music in quite the same way after that."

He was in sync with his time but knew he was not a musician. So he looked for other entry points into the business — record stores, radio, attending the Wharton School of Business, even writing for DownBeat. He learned the ropes, the labels and an endless discography of sessions, released and unreleased, especially of Blue Note sessions. When he met Charlie Lourie, Blue Note's Los Angeles marketing chief, at a press party in the early '70s, Lourie was mightily impressed. "He said let me see if I can pull together a deal," Cuscuna said. "In a day, my dream came true. I started diving into the Blue Note vault, a floor full of steel shelving crammed with unissued Blue Note material. Jesus Christ, I'm in heaven. The wealth of it was more than I imagined."

He got about 80 releases into the Japanese market, and about 20 in the the U.S. But by the '70s the jazz record business was dying. "I was being paid in free records," says Cuscuna, whose heaven was suddenly in waiting. Blue Note was retired and would not return until the EMI takeover in 1985 and the arrival of Bruce Lundvall as the company's president.

Meanwhile, with Blue Note in limbo, Cuscuna and Lourie saw an opportunity that became the model for Mosaic Records: license a specific body of work for a limited run of 5,000 copies and package it with the care and authority that Columbia had brought to its box sets of the 1960s.

"I was incredibly impressed by them," Cuscuna remembers. "They were very much on my mind when I came up with the Mosaic idea. Box sets had fallen by the wayside by late '70s. So I thought it was time to step in with Mosaic and fill the gap."

The first Mosaic came out in 1983: *Thelonious Monk: The Complete Blue Note Recordings*. For Mosaic, direct marketing, no distributors and low inventories meant ultimate sustainability. For Blue Note and sister EMI labels particularly, Mosaic transformed a dusty archive into easy cash. Modernity mingled with tradition. Kid Ory and George Lewis were served along with Mingus and Mulligan, although the catalog has tilted long-term to the post-war scene. Today there are more than 275 Mosaic collections, most circulating as rare collectors items.

Mosaic also transformed the fundamental standards of the reissue and the album note. "I didn't want people to go through what I went through" Cuscuna says, meaning mixing sessions without coherence or explanation. "It drove me nuts. My idea was to make Mosaic definitive, with sessions in proper order, in the best sound, and with the context that only thorough annotation could provide."

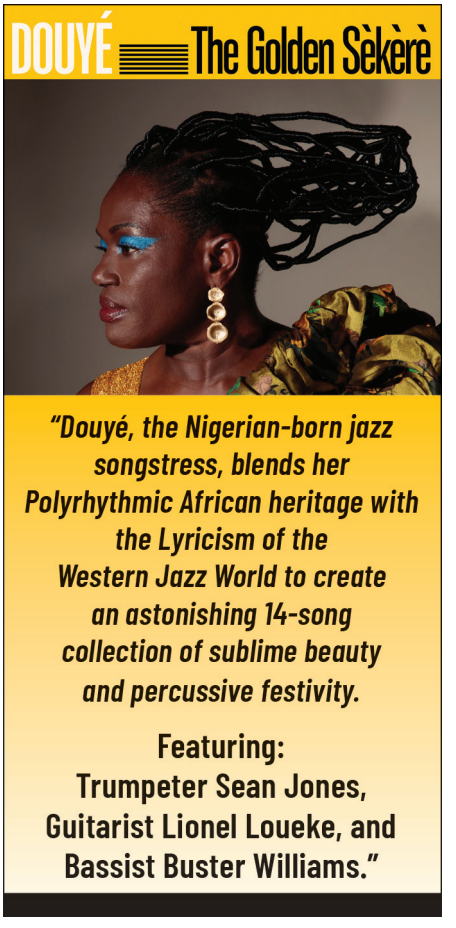
Definitive also meant new material where possible, inclusive of everything released and previously unreleased. For Cuscuna, this came with limits, however. "I'm not a fan of false starts and breakdowns," he says. "But judicially used, I'm fine with partial and alternate takes. But I don't think you should ever put out anything that would embarrass the artist. It's an invasion of privacy. I'm not sure there's a statute of limitation on that rule. That's my take, at least."

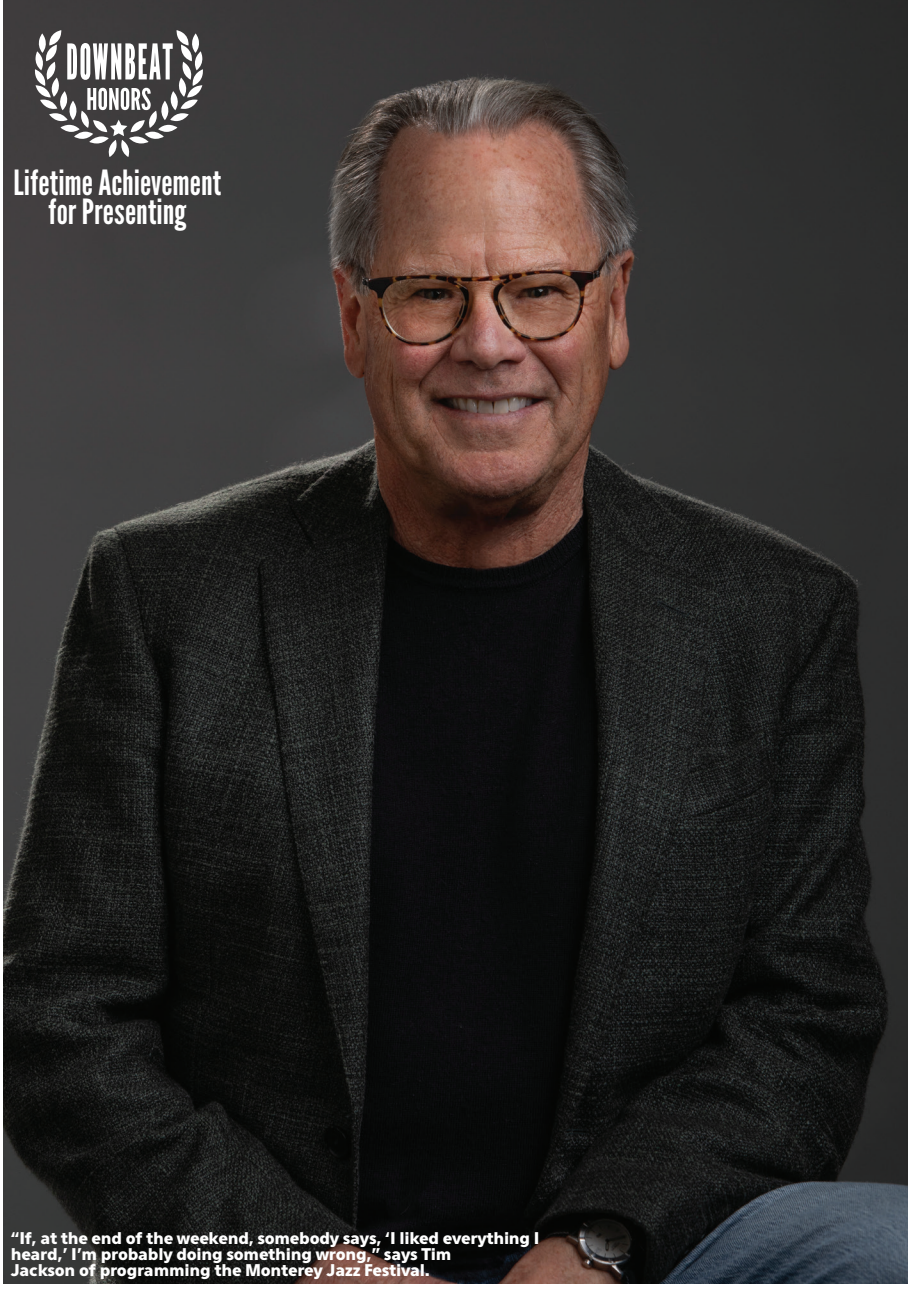
Mosaic had early competition. Time-Life and Franklin Mint each had a similar jazz series at the time. By the mid-'80s, however, they were selling for $8 at Goody's and Tower Records. "That scared me," says Cuscuna, "because we were only a few years into our company when that happened." Today you'll still find Time-Life sets in vinyl stores for a few bucks. But the hand-numbered Mosaics sell on Ebay, sometimes for hundreds of dollars.

Many years ago, Woody Shaw said of Cuscuna, "No matter what you produce or do in your life, the thing you'll be remembered for is rescuing all that Blue Note material."

"Looking back all these years," Cuscuna says today, "I'm content with that." **DB**

'I started diving into the Blue Note vault, a floor full of steel shelving crammed with unissued Blue Note material. Jesus Christ, I'm in heaven.' **—Michael Cuscuna**





"If, at the end of the weekend, somebody says, 'I liked everything I heard,' I'm probably doing something wrong," says Tim Jackson of programming the Monterey Jazz Festival.

Tim Jackson
EXPANDING MONTEREY'S AUDIENCES

By Paul de Barros Photo by RR Jones

"It's an honor," said Monterey Jazz Festival artistic director Tim Jackson, when he heard he would be receiving DownBeat's Lifetime Achievement Award for Jazz Presentation at the 2023 edition of the long-running festival. "DownBeat's always been my favorite. It's like Monterey. It's a legacy brand."

Jackson, who is stepping down after this year, has played a crucial role in creating and sustaining that legacy in Monterey.

"Tim Jackson took Monterey from being a revered festival that was sort of languishing to the very top of what jazz festivals can be," observes Jason Olaine, Jackson's counterpart at New York's Jazz at Lincoln Center.

"He's one of the good guys," says Christian McBride, who this year hosted a pre-festival gala in Jackson's honor. "Everybody loves him. He communicates very well, he's not hustling you, he says what he means and means what he says. For everything that Newport has meant for the East Coast, I really think Monterey has meant the exact same thing on the West Coast."

Even those notoriously crusty bargainers in the background — booking agents — reserve kudos for Jackson.

"You're talking about a guy who is nothing but a class act," says Jack Randall, of Boston's Ted Kurland Agency.

Over the years, Randall has supplied Monterey with such artists as Pat Metheny, Sonny Rollins and Chick Corea and also books the traveling show Monterey Jazz Festival On Tour.

"There's some big shoes to fill there," says Randall.

Indeed. Raised in San Jose, California, Jackson studied flute at San Jose State University and started out as an apprentice for Pete Douglas, owner of the unique venue south of San Francisco called the Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society, in Half Moon Bay.

In 1975, after a year off surfing around the world, Jackson and a cooperative of volunteers created the Kuumbwa Jazz Center, in Santa Cruz.

Jackson still runs that cheeky little startup, which today is a $2 million enterprise that presents jazz year-round in its own building. Remarkably, he added Monterey to his responsibilities in 1991, co-producing the festival that year with founding producer Jimmy Lyons, then taking the reins on his own, in 1992.

"My kids were born right about the time I came to Monterey," recalls Jackson. "When I look back on it, sometimes I don't know where I had the energy to do it all."

Having once played the festival himself, one of the first things Jackson did was upgrade what he felt were its shockingly low production values. He replaced all the sound systems, and later added other improvements, such as giant video screens to the sides of the arena stage.

He also doubled the number of stages from three to six and reinstated traditions from Monterey's early days, such as commissioning new works and appointing an artist-in-residence.

He created Monterey Jazz Festival on Tour; an archive project with Stanford University; the (albeit short-lived) Monterey Jazz Festival Records; and expanded the organization's educational programs. He also showcased new, young artists such as pianist Gerald Clayton,

trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire and flutist Elena Pinderhughes, who had come up in the high school-level Monterey Jazz Festival Next Generation Band.

Jackson generally deflects praise, but happily recalls some of his proudest moments.

"I remember 1994 was an important year for me because it was the first year we re-inaugurated the commission projects," he says. "We did that big orchestra piece with Billy Childs. And we also brought Sonny Rollins after he hadn't been here for, I don't know, maybe since 1972, and we had Max Roach and his M'Boom band. That combination of Max and Sonny and Billy's premiere piece, that was a highlight for me."

He also fondly remembers the "fantastic" 2000 Wayne Shorter commission *Vendiendo Alegria*, 2012's Miles Ahead project (with the Vince Mendoza Orchestra and Terence Blanchard) and the 2016 tribute to Quincy Jones, a complex undertaking that involved recreating the big band Jones used for three late-'60s/early-'70s jazz fusion albums on A&M.

Creative projects like that have played a big role in Jackson's job satisfaction.

"That's one of the things that makes Monterey special," he says, "that we do take the time to actually curate programs."

Of course, there have been disasters, too, like the time in 1992 when Arturo Sandoval accidentally boarded a plane from Houston to Monterrey, Mexico, stranding his band in Monterey, California. Or the nights when Monterey's loyal — yet sometimes curmudgeonly — audience deserted the arena when The Roots (2014) and Tank and the Bangas (2019) took the stage.

But Jackson has always been committed to drawing a younger, more diverse audience, so he took these defections philosophically.

"If, at the end of the weekend, somebody says, 'I liked everything I heard,' I'm probably doing something wrong," he avers. "And the beauty of Monterey is if you truly don't like something, you can just move to another venue."

Jackson took a lot of flak in 2015 for the justified criticism that women were not well represented at the festival. To his credit, he responded vigorously.

"Tim has really done a good job since the awareness campaign," asserts trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, who most recently played Monterey with Artemis.

Monterey had to cancel in 2020, due to the pandemic, but the festival came back at half-speed in 2021 and at full speed in 2022.

Thanks to a surge of interest in live music after the pandemic, as well as generous compensation from the federal government, Jackson is leaving the $4.3 million organization in good shape.

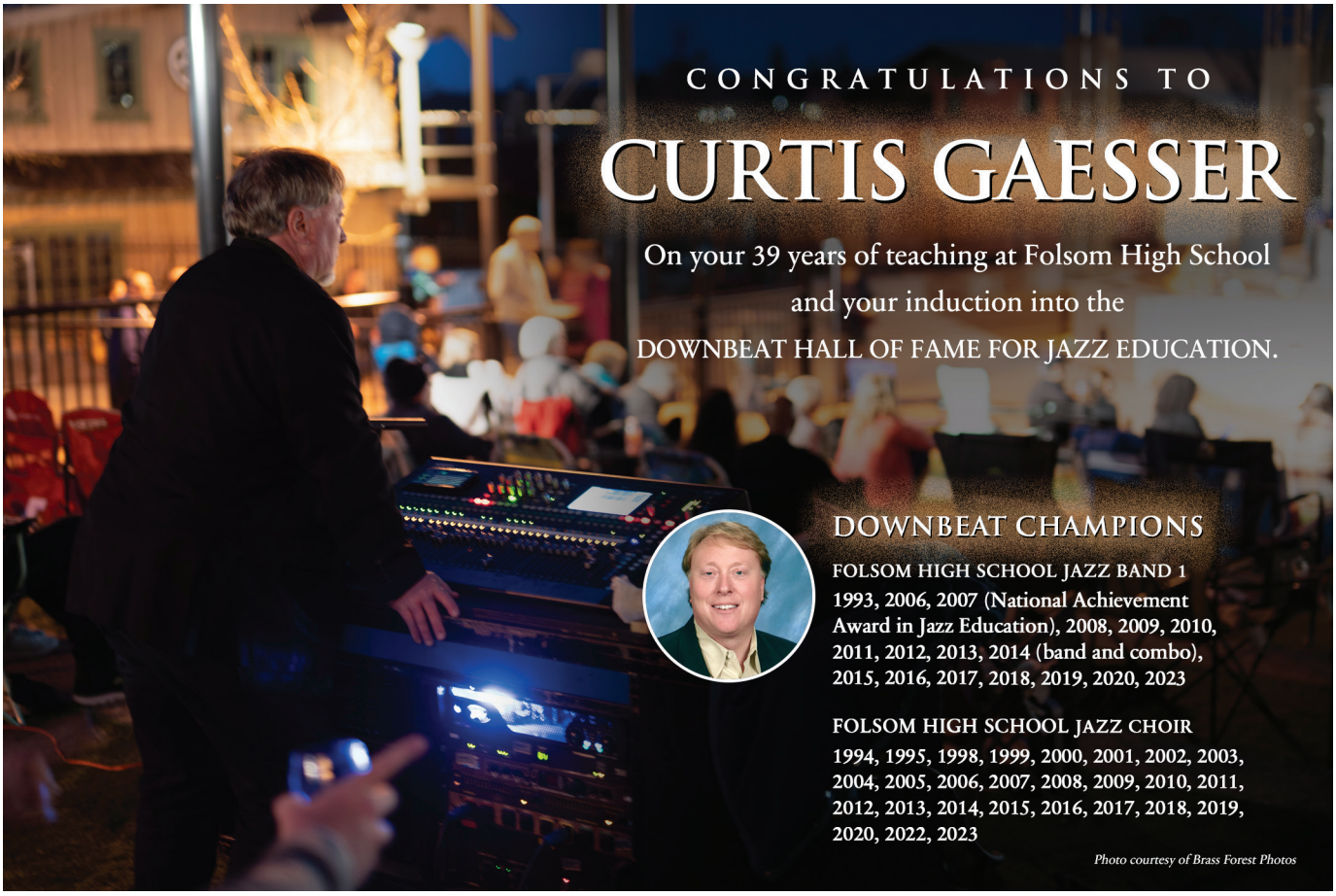
"We're in a better position financially than we've been in 12 years," says executive director Colleen Bailey, who noted that she especially values Jackson's balance of creativity and practicality.

"Sometimes artistic directors have a vision," she says, "but they don't always understand the business implications. Tim really tries to push the music forward, but he also knows that we have to fill the seats."

Jackson says he'll stay on at Kuumbwa for a while, but in the meantime, he plans to spend a lot more time playing flute, traveling and perhaps doing some consulting.

"I look forward to coming to the Monterey Jazz Festival as a civilian," he says. "I feel honored to have been a part of this legacy and tradition, and I'm proud of the work that I did."

At the time of this writing, Jackson's successor had not been chosen. **DB**



"He knew how to administer to the needs of a beginner, and had the skill set and patience to teach somebody young," says saxophonist Greg Osby of his first music teacher, Fred Irby III.

Fred Irby III

BORN TO TEACH

By Terry Perkins Photo courtesy Kennedy Center Opera House

The 2023–'24 academic year marks the 50th year that Fred Irby III taught in Howard University's Department of Music, serving as the coordinator of instrumental music, trumpet instructor and director of the acclaimed Howard University Jazz Ensemble.

So, it's especially fitting that Irby has been inducted this year into the DownBeat Hall of Fame for Jazz Education.

It's not the first honor Irby has received during his distinguished career, with other honors from Grambling State University, Disney Performing Arts, The Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival, The DC Jazz Festival and Southern Illinois University.

Irby's accomplishments as a professional musician are impressive, too, as a longtime member of the Kennedy Center Orchestra, and performing for numerous award and TV shows as well as musicals.

In a recent conversation, Irby focused not on his accomplishments, but on those who inspired him and the students he's nurtured.

"I was born and grew up in Mobile, Alabama, and I remember marching bands parading through the neighborhood," recalled Irby. "I was one of those kids always trailing behind the band. I would say to my father that some day I want to play music and be in a band. In fourth grade, my father purchased a trumpet for me and I'd practice all day — they couldn't take it away from me. I had a great teacher early on, Ulysses Miller. I kept playing through high school and got a scholarship to Grambling."

In college, Irby and fellow students interested in jazz approached professor Frederick Tillis about starting a big band to workshop the music of Duke Ellington and Count Basie.

After graduating college, Irby took a job teaching music in St. Louis. He also started playing with the Municipal Opera Orchestra as well as other professional groups. And he made sure to follow the advice of William Scolala, his trumpet instructor at Grambling.

"He told me that wherever I go to make sure and study with the principal trumpet player in the orchestra there," Irby explained. "I got to St. Louis and sought out Susan Slaughter, principal trumpet player with the St. Louis Symphony. She was teaching at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville across the river, and I enrolled in grad school there. That was one of my most gratifying experiences playing trumpet — learning repertoire and how to be a professional musician.

"While I was there, I also met a dynamic music educator who cemented my decision to teach music," said Irby. "Her name was Dorothy Tullos, and she had such a passion about music education that I consider her one of my most important mentors."

One of Irby's young students in the St. Louis public schools was Greg Osby, who has gone on to build an international career performing and recording as an alto saxophonist and composer. Osby recalled first meeting Irby when he visited Osby's elementary school.

"He stuck his head into the classroom and asked if anybody wanted to learn to play an instrument," said Osby. "Me and my best friend bolted down to the cafeteria to talk to him. He gave me a clarinet and I took to it immediately. Through his tutelage, my progress was rapid, because he knew how to administer to the needs of a beginner, and had the skill set and patience to teach somebody young."

In Irby's second year at Howard, he started the Jazz Ensemble, and over the years, he has taken the group on international tours, recorded annual albums and worked with students who went on to notable jazz careers, including: Osby, Geri Allen, Wallace Roney, Winard Harper, Tim Warfield, Gary Thomas, and James Brandon Lewis.

After his upcoming retirement, Irby said his main focus will be on working to support the program at Howard. "I never had enough money to do everything I wanted to do," he said. "I know the person who comes after me will have the same challenges, so I want to do whatever I can to support them." **DB**

"I mortgaged my house a couple of times, but it was worth it," Muscarella says of working to establish Jazzschool and California Jazz Conservatory.

Susan Muscarella
RICH IN JAZZ

By Yoshi Kato Photo courtesy California Jazz Conservatory

There's a paragraph in Susan Muscarella's book *California Jazz Conservatory: A 25-Year Retrospective* that brings a smile: "I will never forget that late September day in 1997 — the first week of Jazzschool's maiden voyage quarter — when jazz guitarist and founding faculty member Tim Volpicella stopped me in the building's narrow hallway to tell me he thought starting a jazz school was such a great idea that he predicted I would get rich (!) ...

"Years went by, and, as much as I appreciated Tim's optimism, it came as no surprise to me that his prediction never materialized."

While Muscarella may have never leapfrogged tax brackets like some of her Bay Area tech industry neighbors, the educator and pianist can enjoy bragging rights for founding the first and, currently, the only accredited independent conservatory devoted to jazz. She's had an immeasurable impact on generations of music students. And for that, she is now a member of the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame.

"I mortgaged my house a couple of times, but it was worth it," Muscarella reflected during an interview at her office at the conservatory. "I couldn't have built the school without that. And I couldn't *not* build the school."

With characteristic modesty, Muscarella typically deflects focus from herself to the CJC. But discussing the school's legacy without investigating her own accomplishments as an instrumentalist and instructor is akin to examining Duke Ellington's career as a composer and bandleader but not as a pianist.

"I would always wait with bated breath any time she was going to perform," said Maya Kronfeld, a keyboardist with the likes of Thana Alexa and Taylor Eigsti, a literary scholar and an early student of Muscarella's. "And just being in her office, having a piano lesson, was like being in a swinging sanctuary. It was just such a special environment and time."

Muscarella started as a classical piano student growing up in Oakland. "I was predisposed to improvising," she recalled. "I started playing when I was 8, and my teacher improvised for the silent films. I could play by ear, and she caught on to that and inspired me to work on improvising and look at what made up music — theory and all of that."

Most of her school friends were listening to guitar bands like the Beatles, and she hadn't heard any piano music on the radio until she had her jazz epiphany. "When I heard Ramsey Lewis Trio's 'The In Crowd' on AM radio, and heard my own instrument, that was really inspiring for me."

After 14 years playing in and directing the UC Berkeley Jazz Ensembles, Muscarella was ready to pursue her own vision for jazz education. Founded at a former restaurant near Berkeley High School in 1997, Jazzschool featured classes and workshops for students of all ages. She would lead the school's transformations, moves and expansions including a shift to non-profit status in 2002 (allowing for tax-deductable donations) and a relocation to the Downtown Berkeley Arts District in 2002 and the eventual establishment of the accredited spinoff CJC, which would offer associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees.

"I ran the community school program and realized I wanted a more formal program of study. So started designing a curriculum for a bachelor's degree," she recounted. "And becoming accredited was one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life because it helped me build an even more solid foundation for the program."

When asked about her educational philosophy, she replied that it has stayed the same whether applied to Jazzschool's community programs or CJC's degreed offerings. "Jazz programs have been criticized for focusing more on the classroom than on the stage," she noted. "So when I created the tagline for the school, I started out by saying: 'for jazz study and performance.' And we've given our students every [possible] opportunity to perform."

CJC's portfolio continues to include concert series, summer instrumental and vocal intensives and even a café.

After 26 years, Muscarella is retiring from the administrative side of her school. "I'm coming back around to what inspired me to start the school in the first place: the music and the students and teaching, which I really love," she shared. Though she has a hard time qualifying the impact she's had, others can.

"I was taught in an environment where she was the model for what leadership was, and that made me feel so at home as a young woman," declared Kronfeld, who is currently an assistant professor of literature at Duke University. "Seeing her being able to realize her vision so deeply was a huge influence on me becoming an educator."

In the end, it turns out Muscarella did get rich after all. **DB**

"It's been a fantastic career," Gaesser says of his 39 years at Folsom High School. "I don't think there's anything better than seeing kids grow as human beings."

Curtis Gaesser
FINDING MUSICALITY

By Yoshi Kato Photo Courtesy Folsom High School Music Boosters

Somewhere in Curtis Gaesser's house, one can imagine a room overflowing with the awards he's received — everything from the City of Folsom's Person of the Year in 2001 to Folsom Chamber of Commerce's Educator of the Decade and the Jazz Education Network John Laporta Jazz Educator of the Year in 2023.

Add one more honor to that collection: the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame.

But awards were never an endgame for the 39-year music education veteran, who retired from full-time teaching at the end of the 2022–'23 school year and continues to contribute through new avenues. And neither were competitions, though his jazz bands and choirs have certainly dominated those, too. His Folsom High School Jazz Band I has won this magazine's Large Jazz Ensemble Student Music Award 18 times since 1993, while his Jazz Choir is a 27-time winner since 1994.

"It did help with younger kids wanting to be a part of our program, just seeing the band when you're young and saying, 'Man, I want to be a part of that.' So it was good publicity that would help generate a lot of interest," he said, when asked about the significance of competition victories. "There were years when I would audition over 40 sax players, all coming from the two local middle schools."

There were 680 students at Folsom High School when he started in 1987, so faculty were required to teach multiple classes, Gaesser explained. He kept directing marching band, chamber orchestra, concert band, drumline and color guard as well as jazz bands and choir once the school expanded and regularly traveled 20 weekends a year with his different student groups.

By the time he retired, the Folsom High School student body was about 3,000. "As it started growing, I didn't want to let go of anything," he recounted in a phone interview from his home. It was during the first September since 1983 where he wasn't teaching music in a classroom. "The person who does the marching band controls the finances, because that money all comes from the school and football game receipts."

He also required his jazz band students (except for guitarists and pianists) to participate in marching band for two years. "It taught the brass players stamina and breath control while they were moving," he said. "It also really beefed up their chops and added to less of an elitism of being in the top jazz program. Because when you're in a marching band of 130, you're a part of a whole thing."

Some jazz band members remained in marching band for their entire high school careers. "I learned new ways of getting that out of them without verbally saying it," he said, when asked what insight he picked up during his four decades as a music educator. "You can waste a lot of time in the classroom, so I didn't do a lot of pontificating."

With the Reno Jazz Festival at the University of Reno no longer having a student competition component and the Monterey Jazz Festival's Next Generation Festival inactive after the pandemic, he and Gaw Vang Williams, Folsom High School's new band director, launched the inaugural California Jazz Championships for high school and college jazz bands and choirs back in April. Gaesser drew on his 36 years of experience as founder and producer of the Folsom Jazz Festival and drew the praise and appreciation of fellow band directors.

"It's been a fantastic career," Gaesser said. "I don't think there's anything better than seeing kids grow as human beings. The cool thing about us music teachers is that we get kids for four years."

Sacramento County is now mentioned in the same breath as hubs like New York, Houston and the Bay Area when it comes to high school jazz education. He marvels at the growth with humility and a bit of awe: "We were a little Western town with very little culture except for the rodeo and the prison," which was immortalized in Johnny Cash's 1955 hit "Folsom Prison Blues."

Profiles written about Gaesser will typically mention he was raised in Oahu, Hawaii, and that in sixth grade he was asked to teach his music class. A year later, the fledgling ukulele player added saxophone to his instrumental arsenal and dove into jazz. His family moved to the suburbs of Sacramento while he was in high school. After graduating and then earning both bachelor's and master's degrees at Sacramento State University, he's lived and taught exclusively in the area.

But how did his time as an island native influence him musically?

"I was raised with all that beauty," Gaesser said. "It helped me prioritize with my groups that being musical is of the utmost importance over everything else. I felt like you could really move the audience and people emotionally through musicality more than anything else." DB

Mikayla Smith of King's Academy High School in West Palm Beach, Florida is an outstanding performance winner in the Vocal Jazz Soloist category (High School division) in the 2023 DownBeat Student Music Awards.

HIROSHI TAKAOKA

Music is a temporal art, thus rhythm is implicit in every musical gesture, says percussionist-composer Adam Rudolph.

Cyclic Verticalism: A Creative Approach to Mastering Rhythm, Phrasing & Form

Inspiration, intuition and intellect are the touchstones of the creative process, while craft gives us freedom to express what we feel and discover. For the artist in music, the idea is to follow the basics. By the basics, I mean the fundamental elements of music and of sound itself. Understanding and embracing this simplicity allows us to generate any complexity and depth of expression in our own way, and not merely to follow the styles of the day. This is what Sly Stone calls "simplexity."

Just as the laws of physics simplify in the higher dimensions, so too do the elements of music unify as they transcend style and move towards essence. The essential unison — vibration — manifests as a duality: color and motion, or, as they are called in music terminology, timbre and rhythm. The dialogue between color and motion is woven through the complex of space and time.

For an improviser, form is one of the most difficult elements to master. In order to understand form you must be able to generate phrasing. In order to phrase you must have a grasp of rhythm. The great improvisers, such as Miles Davis and Ali Akbar Khan, have all been masters of rhythm. Music is a temporal art, thus rhythm is implicit in every musical gesture. A musician must be able to generate ideas in real time with a clarity that defines where they are at every moment. Only then will their sonic ideas be heard in a way that inspires.

Rhythms played by humans can be looked at in three ways: language, dance and mathematics. Spoken language informs vocal and instrumental performance in a myriad of ways. The Yoruba language, which is tonal, can be spoken on the Iya drum. When North and South Indian musicians use vocalized syllables to teach the drum language, each spoken syllable corresponds to a particular drum stroke.

At the same time, creative and cultural movements of humans are determinants of rhythmic phraseology. In many parts of the world, drum language is a sonic manifestation of dance gesture. Call-and-response harkens to a practice before history, where music, dance and storytelling were one.

Neither the language or dance aspects of rhythm can be notated or codified in a book. They must be learned through first-hand experience. I urge all interested musicians to also go as deeply as possible into whatever rhythm languages and dance forms that attract them.

Mathematics allows the artist to look at rhythm in another way, one that is transcendent of style or culture. The rhythms herein are presented as neutral elements that the performer/composer can use in any way they imagine.

Numerologically, 2 (even) and 3 (odd) are the fundamental building blocks from which all existing rhythms are created; from the heartbeat to the most abstract. The Dogon people of Mali call the even (2) element *tolo* and ascribe to it female or Yin/Shakti energy. *Nya* is the odd (3), male or Yang/Shiva energy. The Dogon say: "Every rhythm has the two parts, often with a complex interplay that suggests both a dialogue and union of male and female principles."

"Cyclic Verticalism" is my creative approach to developing phrasing and form through the combination and expansion of cycles and polyrhythms. Because European notation would misinterpret the true nature of this concept, I created another notational system. Based upon pulses that are accented or left unheard, these rhythm cycles can be counted and felt in several ways. This multiplicity offers musicians the freedom to find their own understanding, feel and musical applications.

The Western European system of notating

Example 1: Pulses of 5-Beat and 7-Beat Cycles

For example, 2 plus 3 yields a 5 beat cycle:

1	2	1	2	3	*Counted division*
X		X			*Accented pulses*
1	2	3	4	5	*Total pulses*

3 plus 2 plus 2 yields a 7 beat cycle:

1	2	3	1	2	1	2	*Counted division*
X			X		X		*Accented pulses*
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	*Total pulses*

Example 2: Fundamental 3-against-2 Polyrhythm

1	2	**3**	4	**5**	6	
X		X		X		*3 duplet accents of the pulse*
X			X			*2 triplet accents of the pulse*
1	2	3	**4**	5	6	

Example 3: Signal Rhythm in 12

1		2		&	1		2		3		&
X		X		X	X		X		X		X
X			X			X			X		
1			2			3			4		

Example 4: Signal Rhythm in 15

Three sets of 5 (2 1/2) against five triplets:

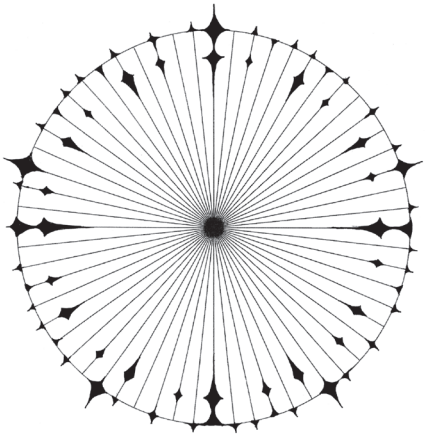
1		2		&	1		2		&	1		2		&
X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X
X			X			X			X			X		
1			2			3			4			5		

Example 5: Signal Rhythm in 21

5 + 7 + 9 (2 1/2 + 3 1/2 + 4 1/2) against seven triplets:

1		2		&	1		2		3		&	1		2		3		4		&
X		X		X	X		X		X		X	X		X		X		X		X
X			X			X			X			X			X			X		

Example 6: Ostinato of Circularity in 60 (utilizing the Signal Rhythm in 15 played four times)



Outside	1		2		&	1		2		3		&	1		2		&	1		2		3		&	1		2		&	1
(12) 5x	X		X		X	X		X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X		X	X		X		X	X
20 triplets	X			X			X			X			X			X			X			X			X			X		
(15) 4x	X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X
Inside	1		2		&	1		2		&	1		2		&	1		2		&	1		2		&	1		2		&

	2		3		&	1		2		&	1		2		3		&	1		2		&	1		2		3		&
	X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X		X
X			X			X			X			X			X			X			X			X			X		
X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X	X		X		X
1		2		&	1		2		&	1		2		&	1		2		&	1		2		&	1		2		&

does not work to represent rhythm from most other music cultures. For example, Western notation demands that one time signature be dominant whereas in many parts of Africa, and the Black Atlantic diaspora, several meters are performed simultaneously without any one of them being dominant. In addition, Western European music notates rhythm in a way we could call "divisive," whereby one whole note is divided into two half notes, four quarter notes, etc. But Indian, Middle Eastern and Eastern European rhythms use what we can call "additive" system, wherein units of 2s and 3s are combined to generate the rhythm cycles.

In Example 1 on page 73, "Cyclic" refers to groups of 2s and 3s (even and odd), which are added together to build rhythm cycles of various lengths.

What I call "Verticalism" references polyrhythms whereby two or more rhythms are played simultaneously. An odd-numbered rhythm cell sounding at the same time as an even-numbered rhythm cell generates motion in sound. The fundamental polyrhythm is 3-against-2. (See Example 2.)

"Signal Rhythms" are short ostinato patterns that imply multiple meters, motion and feel. They are most commonly found in West and Central Africa as well as throughout the African diaspora. The oldest cultures that utilize Signal Rhythms are the Mbuti, Bayaka and other Ituri forest peoples. It is speculated that their magnificent music is the source from which all other musics spring.

Each Signal Rhythm has at its core a balanced interplay of odd (male) and even (female) sonic rhythm units. In their interplay they can create the beauty of ambiguous and rounded multiple feels. (See Example 3.)

Signal Rhythms can also be considered similar to a Mantra. A Mantra is a sound syllable, word or group of words used for spiritual transformation. Short in length, both Mantric seed syllables and Signal Rhythms are repeated over and over. As they continuously orbit, certain special patterned overtone qualities within them are revealed. This creates the space for individual and collective transcendence to happen. A Signal Rhythm in 15 has three groups of five moving against five triplets. (Example 4.)

As for the creation of energy by means of repetition, we need only look to the intricately repeated, patterned sounding of these 2s and 3s. Like a kind of sonic Mandala, generated "Ostinatos of Circularity" play in a synchronized sound-weaving of space and motion. Patterns become like design, thought, dialogue and forms in nature. Over time, these create momentum: an invitation to join in the shared experience of the lifted moment. This Signal Rhythm in 21 has groups of five, seven and nine moving against seven triplets. (Example 5.)

Ostinatos of Circularity are made by combining entire Signal Rhythms or parts of a Signal Rhythm into larger cycles. The cyclic (horizontal) and polymetric (vertical) interplay of odd and even rhythm groupings creates an unlimited expansion of energy that has transcendent qualities. Melodic shapes added to Ostinatos of Circularity patterns allow the repeated circular sonic motion to manifest as form. (Example 6.)

The cyclic (horizontal) and polymetric (vertical) interplay of odd and even rhythm groupings creates an unlimited expansion of energy that has transcendent qualities.

Depicting these rhythms in circular Mandala-like fashion visually represents the nature of what they are and how they function. A circle clearly depicts the orbiting of the rhythm and shows where the patterns come together and move apart. These have fractal qualities and in movement also demonstrate the ever-shifting polarities of Yin and Yang. This tension-and-release is not unlike the orbiting of electrons, planets or galaxies.

These concepts are not merely theory. I have used these and others like them in my compositional and improvisational work for the last four decades. They can be heard on all my recordings, ranging from my though-composed string quartets to my electro-percussion groove Hu Vibrational group.

With consistent practice, these Signal Rhythms will become clearer and more useful. As you gain command of them, apply them to your own performance and writing.

First Excercise

Each of the examples have two rows of boxes. A box marked with "X" shows a sounded pulse, and an empty box shows a silent pulse. For practice, one row can be the left hand and the other row can be right hand.

Start slowly. When you have both hands playing the pattern comfortably, then stop the left hand without stopping or dropping a beat in the right hand.

Continue to play the right hand alone for a few cycles. Bring the left hand back in on the downbeat without stopping or dropping a beat. Do not speed up.

Now, stop the right hand without stopping or dropping a beat in the left hand. Play the left hand alone for a few cycles.

Bring the right hand back in on the downbeat without stopping or dropping a beat. Change hands, without stopping, and go through the same process outlined above.

It is important to be able to switch from one side of a Signal Rhythm (polyrhythm) to another, so go through this entire process step by step until you can do it smoothly and effortlessly, each hand playing consistently without rushing or dropping any beats. Playing slowly is actually more challenging and helpful. Stopping and starting each hand like this is essential to feeling both sides of the polyrhythm.

Second Excercise

It is important to learn these rhythms in your body, not just your mind. Walking in place (standing or even sitting) in the triplets while using the voice or clapping the Signal Rhythm is a great method to help anyone get a grasp of playing these rhythms.

Start slow. Walk or, if sitting, tap your feet. Use a metronome at first if this helps you get started. Once you are confident, turn the metronome off. Vary the tempo. Use any vocal sounds you like. Sing. Walk in place.

If you start on the left foot, then second time around you will be starting on your right foot. It will take two cycles of the Signal Rhythms in 15 or 21 for your left foot to come out on the downbeat of the cycle.

Investigate and use these rhythms in any way you can hear or imagine. Tempo, feel, low and high, short and long, instrumentation, tonalities — all are left up to the creative imagination of the performer and composer.

For those interested in taking a deeper dive into these concepts and ideas, as well as interval systems and creative philosophy, I would refer readers to my book *Sonic Elements*. My previous book, *Pure Rhythm*, also explores hundreds of rhythms using this creative approach. **DB**

Adam Rudolph is a New York-based composer, percussionist and producer. For the past five decades he has performed worldwide, releasing more than 30 recordings as a leader, including with his ensembles Moving Pictures, Hu Vibrational and the 30-piece Go: Organic Orchestra. Rudolph has performed with Yusef Lateef, Don Cherry, Jon Hassel, Sam Rivers, Pharoah Sanders, Muhal Richard Abrams, Shankar, Dave Liebman, Wadada Leo Smith, Philip Glass and Fred Anderson, among others. He is recognized as an innovator in world music, having co-founded in 1978 the Mandingo Griot Society with Foday Musa Suso, and in 1988, with Hassan Hakmoun recorded the first fusion of American and Moroccan Gnawa music. His music methodology books, *Pure Rhythm* (2006) and *Sonic Elements* (2022), as well as his new Hu Vibrational release, *Timeless*, are available at metarecords.com and metarecords.bandcamp.com. Contact Rudolph through adam@metarecords.com.

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ZACHARY MAXWELL STERTZ

By almost never incorporating the third, Dingman's solo has an open quality to it.

Chris Dingman's Vibraphone Improvisation on 'Goddess'

A brisk 5/4 in (sort of) A minor, Chris Dingman's vibraphone solo on his composition "Goddess," from his 2020 album *Embrace* (Inner Arts), certainly displays his chops, and much more. He solos over just bass and drums (the entire album is a trio) and the basic bass line that Linda May Han Oh develops her part from is presented up front.

Examining the rhythms, the argument could be made that it's actually in 5/8, and that's certainly valid. The heavy accent in the middle of the bar (the "and" of 3) divides the measure evenly in half, and could make it sound like the beginning of a new bar. I've written it in 5/4 partly because at this speed that's how I feel the pulse, and also because the notation software I use wouldn't allow polyrhythms over the bar line. (Note to any developers reading this piece: Please rectify this shortcoming in music notation programs that currently don't allow it.)

The solo is predominantly modal, based on A dorian, but Dingman pulls some pentatonic scales out of this. A dorian includes the A minor pentatonic, of course, but B minor pentatonic and E minor pentatonic are also part of it. Dingman gives us some of each. He starts off with a fast ascending A minor pentatonic pickup into the first bar, but then we don't hear this particular sound for the remainder of this improvisation.

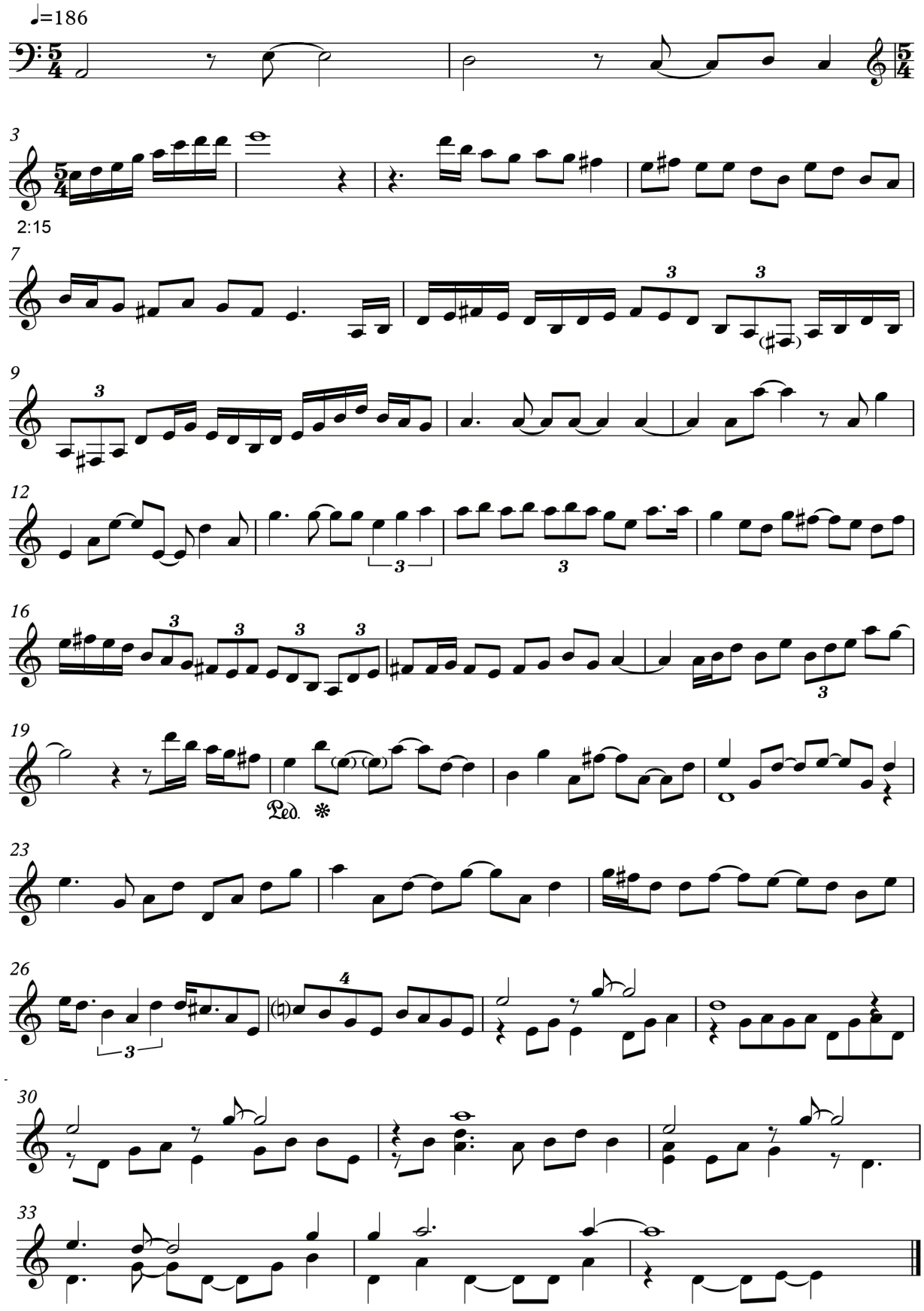
In bar 4 we hear B minor pentatonic, as well as in bar 6, and bar 23 if you don't count that G natural at the beginning of that bar, and E minor pentatonic in measures 11–12 and 18. In the majority of the remaining bars we hear a combination of the two, or another way of hearing it is as A dorian without the C. In fact, the only other time the C natural shows up aside from that opening lick is in bar 27, which is especially curious as there was a C# in the previous measure. These seem to be making a motif of four descending notes landing on E, so it doesn't appear to be something Dingman is using to set up any particular tonality.

Since there are C naturals in the bass line, we do perceive it as A minor (or possibly Am to D7, since the D is at the beginning of the second bar). But by almost never incorporating the third, Dingman's solo has an open quality to it, and creates an unusual contrasting polytonality against the bass part.

Some other things that Dingman does that really move this solo along are his use of sustain and creating the sense of another voice. For the first portion of the solo the notes are very discrete, like a guitarist or piano player would typically play them, and decidedly a single line. But at measure 18 Dingman starts incorporating the sustain pedal to make the notes ring into one another. This makes for a dramatic change in texture.

Three bars into this section (measure 20), Dingman implies another voice, playing a low D under the line. He plays this note again in the following bar, but it's in measure 26 where we get a definite separation of voices. There's also a theme, with a rhythm and contour in the top line and some arpeggios underneath. After this, Dingman goes into a melody (not written here) and all this serves to not only clue in the band that the solo is over but also moves the music into the following section in a manner that brings the listener there logically. This movement from solo to sustained notes to multiple voices to melody brings us into the next part of the performance, and is very effective compositionally.

Dingman has serious technical abilities. To play eighth notes at this velocity (and even triplets and 16ths), and to keep it up for as long as he does, is quite a feat. And after that break in bars 2–3, there really isn't much downtime. This makes the sustained and double-voice parts more effective since Dingman's lines are now restricted solely to eighth notes. The sustained notes also create a sense of longer lines and more space, which helps relax the solo while also somehow bringing up the group's energy level and keeping the track's momentum rolling forward. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He recently released an album of Indian classical music played on the string bass titled *Border Of Hiranyaloka*. Find out more at jimidurso.bandcamp.com.

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Ludwig NeuSonic Drums

Updated Shell Designs, New Sizes, Stunning Wraps & Premium Finishes

Ludwig has updated its line of NeuSonic drums, first introduced five years ago with the goal of offering drummers high-performing kits that blended the vintage Ludwig sound with modern innovations. In addition, Ludwig has debuted its new Rapid Sizes in the NeuSonic line. These sizes deliver 10- by 6-inch and 12- by 7-inch rack toms, plus 14- by 12-inch and 16- by 14-inch floor toms and are offered in the Rapid Mod2 configuration.

One major upgrade to the NeuSonic line is a change of materials, replacing the vintage maple-poplar shell combination with a hybrid four-ply maple exterior/three-ply cherry interior shell. Maple is known for its projection, while the cherry element adds richness, so the combination of the two can lead to a wide range of musical possibilities depending on tuning and the heads chosen. This kit could easily lend itself to jazz, rock or other genres depending on the tuning and size of drums.

Another major goal of the NeuSonic line was to produce it in America, using American natural resources, and to bring it to market with an affordable price tag — a somewhat daunting task that Ludwig has delivered on. A three-piece shell kit including a 20-inch kick, 12-inch tom and 14-inch floor comes in at under $1,300, which is a very reasonable ask for such a quality build.

I test-drove a NeuSonic Fab 3-Piece Shell Pack, which consisted of a 14- by 22-inch bass drum, a 16- by 16-inch floor tom and a 9- by 13-inch mounted tom. While I don't usually pay attention to visuals this early in the play-testing process, it's worth noting right from the start that there are a total of six new finishes available, and they are all striking. The three painted finishes are Satin Royal Blue, Satin Golden Slumbers and Satin Diablo Red. They all "pop" in a brilliant fashion, with a wood finish that peeks through the final color on each one, giving them an appealing texture. There are also three new wraps available: Ebony Pearl, Steel Blue Pearl and Butterscotch Pearl. I received a NeuSonic kit in Butterscotch Pearl, which solicited plenty of "oohs" and "ahhs" from bandmates and curious listeners/onlookers.

On a live gig, these drums responded like a projection powerhouse. While the shell sizes were a bit larger than what I typically use, the tuning options they offered proved to be well worth making the adjustment. The kit ships with standard Remo coated heads, which served the purpose well for the type of gigs I had. I would imagine that swapping out the coated heads for clear heads with their longer resonances would work amazingly well with this maple-cherry shell combination.

It's also worth noting these drums tuned up with exceptional ease using with the factory-shipped Remo heads. There was not a lot of fussing about once I got the general tone going for each drum. One cost-saving feature is to ship the entire kit in a single box, so you need to assemble it Ikea-style. But once you get each drum's tension rod with the appropriate thumb/finger's worth of initial tension, it was an easy task to tune it appropriately. Along these lines, the NeuSonics' use of 45-degree bearing edges also gives the drums more sustain and a wider tuning range, which accounts for their potential use in a wide variety of music genres.

Like all Ludwig USA shells, the NeuSonics are produced using Radio Frequency Technology (RFST) to increase stability. Utilizing a process involving the company's original bladder molds from the 1960s, this high-tech bonding system combined with a specialized adhesive cures each shell evenly over the entire surface. It's a major contributing element to the classic "Ludwig sound."

In regards to hardware, a particularly notable feature of the NeuSonics is the use of the Ludwig Triad Brackets concept. One downside to floating shell systems can be the cumbersome nature of bulky additions to the shell and the added difficulties they present when it comes to changing heads. The Triad Brackets approach provides a much-needed bridge between the floating shell and a tom mount that attaches directly to the wood. It isolates the bolted part to the shell from the mounting rod via rubber gaskets.

Ludwig NeuSonic kits are available in Downbeat, Fab, Pro Beat, Mod 2 and Rapid Mod2 shell pack configurations, with matching 14- by 6.5-inch snare drums and additional drums also available. *—Matt Kern*

ludwig-drums.com

1. A Burst of PowerTone

Rogers' new PowerTone Sunburst drum kits harken back to the brand's 1970s "Big R" era. These kits shine in classic colors and are offered in larger shell profiles with fruitwood stain interiors. The PowerTone Sunburst kit is precision-built with Rogers' proprietary five-ply shells, reinforcement rings and artisan-cut bearing edges in two configurations: 14 by 20 inches, or a 14- by 22-inch bass drum paired with the classic 16- by 16-inch floor tom and 9- by 13-inch rack toms.

More info: rogersdrumsusa.com

2. Metal Snares

Pacific Drums and Percussion (PDP) has added five metal snare drums in a range of sizes. New to PDP's flagship Concept Select series are the 8- by 14-inch aluminum and 8- by 14-inch bell bronze snares featuring 3mm shells. Extending PDP's Concept series are 5- by 14-inch aluminum, brass and copper snare drums, all fitted with double-beaded, rolled 1mm shells.

More info: https://www.pacificdrums.com

3. Brush Tone, Stick Control

Designed to deliver the control of a stick and the tone of a brush, ProMark Nylon Brushes have a soft-touch handle, complete with internal counterweights, that delivers the feel of a rebound drumstick. At the other end, the nylon bristles are fused to ensure optimal playability and durability. Players can find their ideal feel with two Nylon Brush options at the ProMark 5B (pictured) and 2B sizings.

More info: daddario.com

4. Black Panther Expansion

Mapex Drums has expanded the sonic pallet of its Black Panther lineup with Scorpion and Goblin model snare drums. The Scorpion features a 14-inch by 5.5-inch, eight-ply mahogany shell finished in Red Sand Strata, while the Goblin features a 12-inch by 5.5-inch, six-ply walnut shell calibrated to produce a crisp, tight response.

More info: mapexdrums.com

5. Timbale-ize Your Kit

Latin Percussion's single Brass Timbales extend the range of LP's drum set-friendly percussion instruments. The "LP Your Kit" array offers drummers the ability to add a wide range of sounds, effects and tonal textures to their playing. All the instruments are kit-ready and easily mountable. The new 6.5-inch Brass Timbales, fitted with chrome hardware, come in two sizes, 13 inches and 14 inches, and include a heavy-duty mounting bracket.

More info: lpmusic.com

6. Nate Smith's Signature

Vic Firth's Nate Smith Signature Series sticks — slightly thinner than a 7A in the grip, with added length and a medium taper for smooth response and balance — are great for sitting right in the pocket. Their rounded barrel tips allow for articulation at any angle and let drummers and percussionists pull serious sound out of their cymbals.

More info: vicfirth.com

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Blindfold Test ⟩ BY ASHLEY KAHN

Bill Frisell

Fortunate and few are the jazz headliners with options like guitar maestro Bill Frisell, who can choose to lead various bands simultaneously and tour as a featured sideman as well (with drummer Andrew Cyrille). His current choices? The bass-less Bill Frisell FOUR (with saxophonist Greg Tardy, pianist Gerald Clayton and drummer Johnathan Blake) and his double-trio FIVE (with bassists Thomas Morgan and Tony Scherr, and drummers Rudy Royston and Kenny Wollesen), with both groups revealing an expansive musical vision. They share Frisell's understated, melody-driven sound, and both allow their performances to develop and deepen at their own pace, one tune leading to the next with no pause for applause, maintaining mood and melodic flow. On the first day of this year's North Sea Jazz Festival in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, before he performed with Cyrille's quartet and then later with his FOUR lineup, Frisell participated in a live Blindfold Test as part of the festival's "Talking Jazz" series, choosing *not* to rate any of the music using DownBeat's traditional 5-star system.

WOUTER VELLEKOOP

Bill Frisell and writer Ashley Kahn at this year's North Sea Jazz Fest.

Chris Spedding/Peter Frampton

"Work" (*That's The Way I Feel Now*, A&M, 1984) Spedding, Frampton, electric guitars; Marcus Miller, electric bass; Anton Fig, drums.

"Work"— Monk's tune. It's nice but it reminds me of how at Berklee they'll tell you about harmony and 1–3–5–7–9–11 and say just keep piling it up, and we try to stick in as much as you can. But I started thinking about what you leave out, and it was like, Wait a minute! That opens up all kinds of other possibilities. I found this Blindfold Test where they played Monk tunes for Monk and one tune was by Phineas Newborn, and he's a master. But Monk said, "No, no, that's not the bridge — don't play the seventh in those chords." I would love to hear what he would have to say about these guys. Oh, man.

Hank Garland

"Tammy" (*Velvet Guitar*, Harmony, 1960) Garland, electric guitar.

It's Johnny Smith, right? As a guitarist, I can tell it's a big archtop guitar. "Tammy?" That's totally from my childhood — I remember the movie. That was just very beautiful: straightahead tone and harmony. Maybe it's a little corny but I've grown to appreciate just playing melody. I don't know if it really needed bass and drums. [*afterwards*] I have this album! I should know this. I think Hank and Johnny Smith were friends. Also I always think of Gary Burton when I think of Hank — Gary played with a lot of those Nashville guys.

Makaya McCraven

"Lonely" (*In The Moment*, International Anthem, 2014) McCraven, drums; Jeff Parker, electric guitar; Marquis Hill, trumpet; Justefan, vibraphone; Junius Paul, bass.

I like the feel of the guitar player here, where he puts the notes. No affectation. Not derivative. Whoever it is, they had their own thing there. There's a guy in Chicago who surprises me a lot with the range of what he does and there's a clarity and a no-bullshit thing in everything I've heard him do. Is it Jeff Parker? It is? It was more from the spirit that I get from him than actually recognizing the specific sound. There's this song — "My Ideal" — I kept playing over and over again during the pandemic, trying to learn it. I was like fumbling around. Then I heard Jeff's version of it — he has that sound: I don't hear all those references but at the same time it's coming from the history somehow.

Mary Halvorson

"Moonburn" (*Belladonna*, Nonesuch, 2022) Halvorson, electric guitar; Maya Bennardo, Olivia De Prato, violins; Victor Lowrie Tafoya, viola; Tyler J. Borden, cello; Junius Paul, bass; Makaya McCraven, drums.

Some of the things I just said about Jeff is what I'd say about the first time I heard Mary Halvorson. This was quite a while ago in Seattle. It's this double-edged thing — there are so many players where you hear the references and the influences but somehow she came out and just stripped all that away. She found her own voice right away. I love her playing and recently heard her at the Big Ears Festival playing music she had written for guitar and string quartet, like this. It was amazing. She's awesome.

Kurt Rosenwinkel

"Feed The Birds (*Tuppence A Bag*)" (*Everybody Wants To Be A Cat: Disney Jazz, Vol. 1*, Disney, 2009). Rosenwinkel, electric guitar, piano; Joshua Thurston-Milgrom, acoustic bass; Tobias Backhaus, drums.

Is this from *Mary Poppins*? Beautiful song. I'm at a loss. It was very well organized and planned out. I just can't think who it could be. [*afterwards*] Wow. Kurt crossed my mind. Was that from a long time ago? I haven't heard him play recently without effects, just a naked guitar sound. He's another astounding player. He took some liberties with this tune but it felt, in a way, very … there were a lot of places they could have done something. They just had it very worked out with the arrangement. That always happens to me — I do a recording and then do the gig and things start breaking apart more. I'm sure that would have happened with this tune, too.

Chico Hamilton

"Larry Of Arabia" (*The Dealer*, Impulse, 1967) Hamilton, drums; Larry Coryell, electric guitar; Ernie Hayes, organ.

At first I was thinking Kenny Burrell, but then … I really liked it. Wait. I've heard this, but I can't put my finger on it. Again, it's the guitar that's being played — a fat guitar. I can see the guitar and he's pushing it a little bit past what it's supposed to do. It's Larry Coryell. You can hear that. The thing that made me think of super-early Larry is that he played a big Gibson archtop guitar — like Mary Halvorson's, with the same pickup Mary uses. What also gave it away was his eighth notes, the feel when he started to play the more bebop vocabulary. He came out of that — starting out playing in a rock band in Seattle, then getting into Wes Montgomery and all that stuff. I first heard Larry soon after this, in 1968, at the first jazz concert I ever went to, when he was performing with Gary Burton, playing that same guitar, and he was feeding back. You can hear the edges of that starting to happen here. **DB**

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.

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